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PATRICK HENRY:
ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND DOMESTIC LIFE IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY VIRGINIA

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Henry's biographers provided a solid foundation for this study. The accounts by Richard Beeman and Henry Mayer proved especially useful, and in many ways have shaped my understanding of Henry and of the society in which he lived. Beeman's biography is part of a larger corpus of work on eighteenth-century Virginia, and his analysis of the development of Virginia's Southside and Piedmont was immensely helpful. Beeman and Mayer's biographies are necessary reading for anyone who seeks to interpret Patrick Henry's life.

Three other historians have influenced my thinking, and the body of their work undergirds my own. Rhys Isaac, Timothy Breen, and Allan Kulikoff are all perceptive analysts of colonial and early-national Virginia, and their studies and insights have guided me throughout this essay.

My work has been buoyed by the kindness and assistance of many people. I am especially indebted to Jim Elson, Joe Frederickson, Fred and Elaine Lindstrom, Edith Poindexter, Kelly Sinclair, and the staffs of the Virginia Historical Society, Virginia State Library and Archives, Jones Memorial Library, and the Library of Congress. Richard Bushman, Emory Evans, James Henretta, Ron Hoffman, Mark Leone, and Lorena Walsh generously made available to me their time and expertise. Richard Beeman, Al Chambers, James Elson, Virginia English, and Edith Poindexter read earlier versions of this essay, and my work has benefitted from their criticism. What errors remain are entirely my own.

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Preface

This study provides an interpretive account of Patrick Henry's life at Red Hill Plantation, his home between 1794 and 1799 and the site of his burial. Unfortunately, the documentary record of Henry's life is meager, the more so for the last ten years of his life. Visitors or travelers accounts that might describe the plantation could not be located. Land deeds do not contain descriptions of the buildings, and neither Henry nor his immediate heirs subscribed to a fire insurance policy. Most of Henry's scarce surviving correspondence after 1790 relates to land speculation, politics or legal matters, and few of Henry's other existing records shed any light on his plantation activities. Plantation account books for his last years have not survived, and the business of managing his abundant lands must be deduced from scraps of evidence. Most of the colorful stories of his last years were recorded well past his death, and cannot be verified. The earliest regional/local maps date from the 1860s, well past his tenure. A handful of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century photographs depict Red Hill during two subsequent--and major--construction programs by his heirs; but these images focus on the dwelling and law office alone. A mid nineteenth-century travel book contains a short description of the plantation house and its surroundings, suggesting that the estate during Henry's tenure was similar in scale and scope to what now exists. But the house and outbuildings have been relocated around the Red Hill site on more than one occasion, confusing any precise knowledge of the appearance or layout of Henry's plantation. Ultimately, without fresh documentation, Henry's personal and plantation life is, and likely will continue to be, largely a mystery.

Yet Red Hill is the designated Patrick Henry National Memorial, dedicated to the memory of a man who was, by all reckoning, a critical figure in the early history of the United States. If his activities at Red Hill cannot be reconstructed in detail, they can be speculatively determined within the context of late eighteenth-century Virginia society, economy, and politics. Henry participated in a political culture that emphasized personal deportment, and his political beliefs had ramifications for the fashion in which he structured his personal life. Henry's life at Red Hill was organically connected to his political and social career, and much of what follows traces the evolution of that career in the 1760s, 1770s, and 1780s.

This report is organized into five thematic chapters: a brief biographical overview of Henry's life, followed by discussions of his economic, political, and domestic spheres of activity. The concluding chapter offers a short description of the social significance of houses in eighteenth-century Virginia, which aims to suggest why Henry might have found Red Hill a desireable home. Each of the last four chapters begins with a broad survey of the eighteenth-century Virginia setting and concludes by discussing the particulars of Henry's life. Assessments of the architecture at Red Hill and recommendations for its presentation and interpretation are included as appendices.

INTRODUCTION

Most Americans recall Patrick Henry as the man who spoke the words "Give me Liberty, or give me Death!" More informed citizens honor him principally as a patriot politician or as a 'founding father,' one of a handful of wise and virtuous men who (so the legends go) through decisive action and heroism created the United States.

Most historians share this perception of Henry, though perhaps with less obeisance to popular mythology. They, too, remember Henry for the litany of his political achievements. Just nine days after first assuming office as a representative of Louisa County, Henry presented the Stamp Act resolutions, a declaration that "was itself an event of first importance in inaugurating the American search for principles."[1] He was active in the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he represented Louisa (and later Hanover) County, before the American Revolution. By 1776, "he was recognized as the principal spokesman for the Revolution in the Old Dominion, a man who by his prescience would cause men initially antagonistic to him ultimately to join ranks with him."[2] As the revolutionary crisis intensified, Henry and other prominent burgesses, including Thomas Jefferson and Richard Henry Lee, established the Virginia Committee of Correspondence, a crucial action in "the first tentative steps toward political integration."[3] Henry participated in the First and Second Continental Congresses and in the Virginia Conventions of March and August 1775. He was Virginia's first governor, serving three terms between 1776 and 1779, when he staunchly supported General George Washington. (Washington, in one of a number of letters thanking Henry, wrote in 1778, "I hold myself infinitely obliged to the legislature for the ready attention which they have paid to my representation of the wants of the army, and to you for the strenuous manner in which you have recommended to the people an observance of my request.")[4] In 1778, Henry supported the successful efforts of George Rogers Clark to conquer the Northwest Territory, and he served two additional terms as Governor of Virginia in 1784 and 1785.[5] He led the opposition to the Constitution in the Virginia ratifying convention, and was an important participant in the political jockeying that occurred in the Virginia legislature immediately after ratification.[6] In 1799 Henry came out of a nine-year retirement from politics and was elected to the Virginia Assembly for the last time.

Although Henry is foremost remembered and revered as a 'founding father,' as a leader in the politics that created our country, it is also true that he participated in a larger culture and society that guided the choices that he made. Henry lived enmeshed in a body of received

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[1] Edmund Morgan, The Birth of the Republic, 1763-1789 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956): 23.

[2] Richard Beeman, Patrick Henry: A Biography (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1974): 41.

[3] James Henretta, Evolution of American Society, 1700-1815, (Lexington, Ma.: Heath, 1973): 215.

[4] George Washington to Patrick Henry, 19 April 1778, cited in Moses Coit Tyler, Patrick Henry (New York: Chelsea House, 1980): 270.

[5] Mayer, Son of Thunder: Patrick Henry and the American Republic, (New York: Watts, 1986): 311-339; Robert Douthat Meade, Patrick Henry: Practical Revolutionary (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969): 124-242, passim.

[6] Gordon Wood, Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Richard Beeman, The Old Dominion and the New Nation (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1972); Merrill Jensen, The New Nation: A History of the United States During the Confederation, 1781-1789 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1950).

understanding and a web of assumptions concerning the nature of his world, which shaped his political, economic, and social actions. Notions of political and social legitimacy, proper economic relationships, and social justice ordered much that Henry did. He absorbed and internalized the eighteenth-century Virginia political ideals that derived from the nature of the economy; from the commonwealth ideology of the English-country opposition to the regime of Robert Walpole and his successors, from the English common-law tradition, and from religion. These forces would provide a common political language to the patriot politicians and evolve into a peculiarly American version of British political thought.[7] Other normative assumptions concerning proper social relations, especially between men and women, likewise exercised a profound influence on Henry's life.

Henry achieved political prominence at a time when Virginia culture and society were undergoing transformation, and his political choices reflected social and cultural tensions within Virginia, as well as Henry's own intense localism.[8] Prior to the American Revolution, Henry sought to gain a place among the great gentleman planters at the head of Virginia society, and during the Revolution, Henry was at the forefront of gentry efforts to mobilize the yeomen in support of independence. But after the Revolution, at the pinnacle of political success, Henry came to doubt the efficacy of Virginia's government and social institutions to ensure the liberty of the people; and in his last years he supported politicians who desired a stronger, more authoritarian government, removed from popular politics. Many of Henry's decisions after the Revolution resulted from his experience as a legislator and governor, and from his concern that post-Revolutionary Virginia did not have the requisite virtue to sustain republican government. The political methods he used were directed toward maintaining the rule of virtuous gentlemen, but in many instances they slipped from his control and led to consequences other than intended. Thus, understanding Patrick Henry the founding father is more complicated than popular history and mythology suggest. He was very much the product of a particular culture and a particular society, both themselves undergoing change.

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[7] Forrest McDonald, Novus Ordo Seclorum: Intellectual Origins of the Constitution, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1985), offers a brilliant discussion of the antecedents of American political thought. McDonald builds upon the earlier, magisterial examinations of republicanism by Bailyn and Wood. See esp. Bailyn, Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1967), and Wood, Creation of the American Republic.

[8] Rhys Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); T.H. Breen, Tobacco Culture: Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); more generally, see William G. McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Henry's localism is emphasized in Beeman, Henry.

Chapter 1:

BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW: PATRICK HENRY, 1736-99

Patrick Henry was born on 29 May 1736, at Studley plantation in Hanover County, Virginia. His father, John Henry, was a Scotsman educated at Kings College, Aberdeen; he arrived in Virginia in 1727 and settled at the estate of his fellow countryman, Colonel John Syme. When Syme died in 1731, John Henry married Syme's widow, Sarah Winston, and became a gentleman of substance in his own right. During the minority of his half-brother, John Syme, Patrick Henry lived at Studley. In 1749, when Syme came of age and inherited the estate, the Henry family moved to Mount Brilliant plantation, also in Hanover County. Mount Brilliant was not an established plantation; indeed, a number of Henry's relatives knew the estate by another name. Henry "was bred and educated at the Retreat, the seat of his father," a family friend recounted some years after Henry's death.[9] The name was apt, for with the move, the prospects of the family greatly diminished.[10]

Patrick Henry grew up comfortably, but in a household that could remember real wealth. His father never achieved success as a tobacco planter or land speculator, and was reduced by the early 1760s to supporting his family by teaching school.[11] Colonel Samuel Meredith recalled years later that Henry "was sent to a common English school until about the age of 10, where he learned to read and write, and acquired some little knowledge of arithmetic. He never went to any other school, public or private, but remained with his father, who was his only tutor. With him he acquired a knowledge of the Latin language and a smattering of Greek."[12] Henry received religious instruction from his uncle, Patrick, a staunch Anglican and rector of the parish church; from his mother, caught up in the exuberance of the "new light" Presbyterian revivals, Henry "gained a sense of ardent fellowship, an appreciation of the power 'enthusiastick' emotion and zeal, and a striking sense of theater."[13] In 1754, after some months of training as a merchant and a failed attempt at managing a country store, Patrick Henry married Sarah Shelton. He was 18 years old.

Henry began married life auspiciously enough. John Shelton, Sarah's father, provided the

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[9] William Winston to William Wirt, undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

[10] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 25-44; Robert Douthat Meade, Patrick Henry: Patriot in the Making (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1957); Beeman, Henry, 2-5: Beeman paints a somewhat rosy picture of John Henry's prospects, but Mayer argues that John Henry was unable to achieve the status that his fortunate marriage might have promised.

[11] "[John Henry's] fortunes were small and to support a large family, he kept a school at his own house, where he instructed about 20 young gentlemen annually in the Greek and Latin languages." Nathaniel Popys to William Wirt, "Anecdotes Relative to Patrick Henry," undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

[12] "Col. Merediths Statement," Undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress. George Morgan, The True Patrick Henry (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1907), Appendix A, 431, recounts that the statement was "taken down by Judge William H. Cabell," undoubtedly at the request of William Wirt.

[13] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 33-40; Isaac, Transformation, 143-57; Isaac, "Religion and Authority: Problems of the Anglican Establishment in Virginia in the Era of the Great Awakening and the Parson's Cause," WMQ, 3rd Ser., 30 (1973): 113-36.

couple with 300 acres of sandy upland soil suitably called 'Pine Slash,' six slaves, and a number of farm buildings. It was a hopeful start, although it would require years of back-breaking labor and a fair measure of luck to achieve the circumstances that Henry's half-brother John had inherited. But Henry had no success farming tobacco. The aristocratic Edmund Winston recalled with distaste, "[Henry] was obliged to labour with his own hands, to obtain a scanty support for his family." Others suggested that Henry was not committed to tobacco farming. He "led a very dissipate and idle life," George Dabney recollected in 1805, "he was a careless wild youth, but free from the vices generally associated with such a life." Another relative recalled that "before and two years after his marriage [he] was remarkably fond of hunting, fishing, and playing on the violin."[14]

Three years after Henry married disaster struck; the main house at Pine Slash caught fire and burned to the ground. For the ensuing eight years the Henry family lived at the Hanover Tavern, operated by John Shelton. During that time, Henry helped operate the tavern, farmed at Pine Slash, made a second (and again unsuccessful) attempt at store-keeping and, sometime in 1759 or early 1760, decided to study law.[15]

Henry's decision to practice law, like many decisions of his youth, seems to have been a precipitate one. He was desperate, according to Edmund Winston, "in very narrow circumstances, making a last effort to supply the wants of his family."[16] Law was a licensed profession in Virginia in 1760. According to a 1732 statute, prospective attorneys had to be examined by a board of General Court attorneys appointed by the royal governor and his council, a process that at least theoretically barred poor or untrained lawyers from practice. "He was not more than six or eight months engaged in the study of the law, during which time he secluded himself from the world, availing himself of the use of a few books owned by his father," Colonel Meredith remembered. In April 1760, Henry made the two-day trip to Williamsburg and received his license, after being examined by George Wythe and John Randolph.[17]

Henry's legal practice was not an immediate success. Initially, he "got little or no business & made no figure," according to a friend. "He was not distinguished at the bar for near four years," wrote another.[18] His peers seem overly critical. By the end of 1760, Henry had handled some 176 cases for seventy-five clients, earning more than £60; by the end of 1763,

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[14] Edmund Winston to William Wirt, undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress; George Dabney to William Wirt, 14 May 1805, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress; Nathaniel Popys to William Wirt, "Anecdotes Relative Patrick Henry for William Wirt," undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

[15] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 45-51.

[16] Edmund Winston to William Wirt, undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

[17] "Col. Merediths Statement"; Mayer, Son of Thunder, 54-57; for a discussion of the development of the legal profession in Virginia see A.G. Roeber, Faithful Magistrates and Republican Lawyers: Creators of Virginia Legal Culture, 1680-1810 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981): 108-11. The 1732 statute regulating the profession was struck down by the General Assembly in 1742, but it was reenacted in 1746 and continued in force until the colony courts were closed in 1774.

[18] "Col. Meredith's Statement"; Edmund Winston to William Wirt, undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

he had taken in about £200, far more than he had earned as a tobacco farmer or merchant.[19] Nonetheless, in 1763 Henry was still a man of only moderate means. That year he was retained for the defendant in an infamous case that came to known as the "Parson's Cause"--a case that established his reputation as a skilled lawyer.

The Parson's Cause pitted the Anglican clergy against the Virginia squirarchy. Through the General Assembly, the Virginia gentry acted in 1758 to reduce the salaries the clergy had enjoyed under an earlier act of 1749. The English Privy Council declared the law invalid in 1759. Four lawsuits wended their way through the courts as the clergy attempted to regain lost pay, and in Hanover County, where the Reverend Maury had sued Thomas Johnson, collector of parish levies, one of them came to trial in November 1763. Henry's performance was, by all accounts, brilliant, and the jury found for the defendant. It was, Edmund Winston says, "the first indication of [Henry's] superior talents."[20]

The most immediate result of the case was to enhance Henry's prominence as a lawyer. Between 1764 and 1768 he collected fees in more than 2,200 civil cases, netting more than £2,500. Most of these cases were small, and many involved the collection of debts for local merchants. One of his most important clients was Thomas Johnson, the gentleman Henry had defended in the Parson's Cause, whose interests Henry represented for a number of years. In the long run, Henry's stirring oratory before the bar brought him to the attention of local gentlemen, and created the possibility of a political career. In 1765, propelled by his growing renown and through Johnson's patronage, Henry was elected to represent Louisa County in the Virginia House of Burgesses.[21]

In the Assembly, Henry made his mark almost immediately. In 1763 England concluded the victorious Seven Years' War with France, which had been enormously expensive, and which had been financed with public credit. George Grenville, the English Chancellor of the Exchequer, sought to tax the colonies to help pay the debt (a reasonable thing from the British perspective, since much of the war had been fought there), and in March 1765 Parliament passed the Stamp Act. Colonial opposition to the action was fierce, and on 29 May, just nine days after Henry first assumed his seat in the Assembly, the Virginia House of Burgesses considered the issue. Patrick Henry rose and delivered a series of resolutions, written some nights before with the assistance of John Fleming, George Johnston, and Robert Munford, that condemned the Stamp Act in ringing tones. Henry spoke with customary flair in defense of the resolutions, and the body of the resolutions was passed by a narrow

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[19] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 58.

[20] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 58-66; Isaac, "Religion and Authority: Problems of the Anglican Establishment in Virginia in the Era of Great Awakening and the Parson's Cause," WMQ, 3rd Ser., 30 (1973): 113-36; quote is from Edmund Winston to William Wirt, undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

[21] Beeman, Henry, 22, 30-31; Mayer, Son of Thunder, 69-70, 102-04.

margin.[22] The Virginia Resolutions were the first articulation of colonial perceptions of the limits of parliamentary power; they provided a model for legislative action to other colonies, legitimation for popular resistance to the act, and a reputation for Patrick Henry as a radical.[23]

Henry continued to serve in the Assembly until 1776, when he was elected the first governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. During this time he gradually emerged as a leader of the younger and more radical burgesses, many of whom represented the Piedmont and Southside regions of Virginia. A series of scandals in the Tidewater gentry's leadership, including Treasurer Robinson's illegal loans to his friends and the murder trial of Colonel John Chiswell, discredited the older House leadership and opened the way for Henry and his associates. By 1773, when the burning of the royal customs ship GASPEE in Rhode Island further strained colonial relations with England, Henry, along with men like Thomas Jefferson and Richard Henry Lee, was considered a leading figure in the radical faction.[24]

Henry's leadership in the House became more prominent amid the whirl of events that preceded the Declaration of Independence. In 1773, Henry, Jefferson, Richard Henry Lee, Dabney Carr, and Francis Lee prepared the legislative ground work to establish a committee of correspondence, an important step toward making revolution possible. "These committees," one historian writes, "would serve as a transition between the ill-organized and loosely coordinated colonial opposition prior to 1773 and the Continental Congresses, which would first convene in fall 1774."[25] Henry was among those who urged the founding of non-importation associations in the unofficial Assembly that met at Raleigh Tavern after the governor prorogued the session in May 1774. Henry's forceful oratory and character made lasting impressions, and was a major factor in his rise to political leadership. George Mason, for example, commented that, "He is by far the most powerful speaker I ever heard. . . . But his eloquence is the smallest part of his merit. He is, in my opinion, the first man upon this continent, as well in abilities as public virtues."[26]

In May 1774 the committee of correspondence called for a convention of county delegates to meet in Williamsburg, to choose delegates for a colonywide convention. Patrick Henry and his half-brother, John Syme, were chosen to represent Hanover County. When the convention

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[22] The content of Henry's speech has become the stuff of legend, and William Wirt's description is predictably theatrical. "Caesar had his Brutus--Charles the First, his Cromwell," thundered Henry at the close of his speech. "and George the Third--('Treason!' cried the speaker--'Treason! treason!' echoed from every part of the house. . . . Henry faltered not for an instant; but rising to a loftier attitude, and fixing on the speaker an eye of the most determined fire, he finished his sentence with the firmest emphasis)--may profit by their example. If this be treason, make the most of it." Wirt, Henry, 83. The only surviving account of the speech given by a witness, however, is considerably less dramatic than tradition or Wirt indicate. It is unclear how many resolutions were actually presented. Five were accepted by the house, but the fifth was reversed the next day. Newspaper accounts indicate there may originally have been as many as seven resolutions. See the excellent discussion of the Stamp Act and Henry's role in opposing it in Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution (New York: Macmillan, 1963), esp. pp. 120-33.

[23] Morgan, Stamp Act Crisis, 120-33.

[24] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 104-14; Breen, Tobacco Culture, 103-05; Beeman, Henry, 49.

[25] Beeman, Henry, 50.

[26] George Mason to Martin Cockburn, as cited in Tyler, Henry, 98.

met in August, it selected Patrick Henry--along with George Washington, Peyton Randolph, Richard Henry Lee, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, and Edmund Pendleton--to represent Virginia at the first Continental Congress. Henry's selection marked him as one of Virginia's foremost political leaders.[27]

The First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia and began deliberations on 5 September 1774, when a quorum was assembled. An issue quickly arose that would not be fully settled until the Constitutional Convention of 1788: How should representation in a Congress be apportioned? The small states argued that each state should have equal representation, while the large states insisted that representation be apportioned on the basis of population. Henry rose to address the issue, making what is perhaps his most misunderstood speech. Arguing in defense of Virginia's interest, Henry maintained that, "Government is dissolved," and that the colonies were in a "state of nature." "It is," he said, "one of the great duties of the democratical part of the constitution to keep itself pure. . . . The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian," he claimed, "but an American." This was not, historian Richard Beeman has noted, an argument for central continental government; quite the opposite, it was a tactical device in a larger attempt to preserve Virginia's interest. Henry's speech illustrates what would be a recurring theme in his political life--the willingness to forgo ideological consistency for the sake of the best interest, as he perceived it, of Virginia. "To misread this oft-misquoted statement," Beeman writes, "is to ignore one of the few consistent aspects of his political life--the attachment to local and provincial interests, an attachment born of the fact that nearly all of his political experience and popular support lay at the local level."[28]

Some of the delegates were excited by Henry's powerful speeches. Silas Deane, soon after one series of debates, wrote that Henry was "the compleatest speaker I ever heard. If his future speeches are equal to the small samples he has hitherto given us, they will be worth preserving; . . . I can give you no idea of the music of his voice, or the high-wrought yet natural elegance of his style and manner." Yet, despite his oratorical flair, he was, as Beeman put it, "only one able man among many exceptional men and a relatively inexperienced one at that." Indeed, Secretary of the Congress Charles Thomson was unimpressed by the Virginian, stating, "from his appearance I took him for a Presbyterian clergyman, used to haranguing the people." All in all, Henry's contribution to the First Continental Congress was not overly distinguished.[29]

Henry represented Hanover County at the Second Virginia Convention, which met at St. John's Church in Richmond on 20 March 1775, amid increasing tension between the colonies and England. Edmund Pendleton introduced a petition to the King on 23 March, which had been written by the Jamaican General Assembly in December. The Jamaican petition contained a strong assertion of colonial rights, but it renounced forceful resistance to English authority and

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[27] Beeman, Henry, 52-57.

[28] Beeman, Henry, 60-61. Henry's speech is reported in Tyler, Henry, 111-12.

[29] For Thomson and Deane's comments, see Tyler, Henry, 109, 115; and Beeman, Henry, 63; see Mayer, Son of Thunder, 207-29, for a comprehensive discussion of Henry's role in the First Continental Congress.

argued that American rights were derived from the monarch--not from fundamental principles. Henry opposed Pendelton's resolutions with resolutions of his own. He argued that "a well-regulated militia, composed of gentlemen and yeomen, is the natural strength and only security of free government." He went on to assert that "the establishment of such a militia is, at this time, peculiarly necessary," and proposed that the colony "be immediately put into a posture of defence."[30] In the debate that ensued, Henry rose to deliver what is his most famous speech.

William Wirt, Henry's first biographer, gives a dramatic account of the speech. Before the crowded assembly in St. John's Church, Henry "rose at this time with a majesty unusual to him in an exordium, and with all that self-possession by which he was so invariably distinguished." The structure of his speech was drawn from the biblical book of Jeremiah. "Were we disposed," Henry asked, "to be of the number of those, who having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation?" Toward his close, he continued, "Gentlemen may cry peace, peace--but there is no peace." Henry thundered in conclusion, "What is it that the gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God!--I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"[31]

The speech was a magnificent thematic interweaving of biblical prophecies of destruction with republican fears that England was a center of corruption and conspiracy against colonial liberty. "Attacking the conciliators," one historian comments, "Henry equated them with the false prophets of Judah, whose equanimity in the face of danger resulted in ruin, derogating his adversaries with one of the most damning names he could devise."[32] Edmund Randolph, in his History of Virginia, says that Henry's oratory "blazed so as to warm the coldest heart . . . . Henry was thought in his attitude to resemble St. David, while preaching at Athens, and to speak as man was never known to speak before." Thomas Marshall, the father of future Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, afterward said the speech was "one of the most bold, vehement, and animated pieces of eloquence that had ever been delivered." And it had an immense impact on its audience, swaying undecided members to Henry's position: the Assembly accepted Henry's resolutions, and appointed him to chair the committee to prepare the defenses of the colony.[33]

On 19 April 1775, British General Gage, appointed Governor of Massachusetts by the Coercive Acts of 1774, ordered a substantial force of redcoats to Concord to seize part of Massachusett's

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[30] Cited in William Wirt, Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry, 9th ed. (Philadelphia: Ayer Company Publications, 1836): 134-35.

[31] The argument that Henry's speech is a Virginia version of a Jeremiad is made by Charles L. Cohen, "The 'Liberty or Death' Speech: A Note on Religion and Revolutionary Rhetoric," WMQ, 3rd ser., 38 (1981): 702-17. Quotes are from Wirt, Sketches, 138.

[32] Cohen, 716.

[33] Edmund Randolph, History of Virginia, ed. Arthur H. Shaffer (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970): 212-13; Thomas Marshall, as cited in Wirt, Sketches, 142.

stock of gunpowder, provoking the battle of Lexington and Concord. A day later, Virginia's Governor Dunmore appropriated the Virginia supply from the public magazine in Williamsburg. Volunteer militia companies, their existence legitimated six weeks earlier by Henry's speech, hastened to gather. Dunmore responded--with disastrous consequences for royal authority in Virginia--by threatening to arm and emancipate all slaves who would fight for him. The articulation of this policy, perhaps more than any other English action before the Revolution, prompted conservative Virginia planters to support the Revolution. On 2 May, Henry mobilized the Hanover County militia and marched on Williamsburg, stopping along the way to demand £330 compensation from Richard Corbin, the king's surveyor general. When Carter Braxton met the company at Doncastle's Ordinary to promise payment, Henry and the militia returned to Hanover. On 6 May, Governor Dunmore published a proclamation denouncing Henry's actions, laying out charges that might serve for proceedings of attainder against Henry.[34]

Henry was elected to the Second Continental Congress in March 1775, polling more votes than Thomas Jefferson, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, Edmund Pendleton, and Richard Henry Lee, and only two votes less than Peyton Randolph and one less than George Washington.[35] Like his participation in the First Continental Congress, Henry was subdued when he attended the second one in summer 1775, and he had little impact on the proceedings there. He withdrew from Philadelphia for two weeks in May to be inoculated against small pox, and on his return assisted Washington to assume his duties as commander-in-chief of Congress' armies. Jefferson, writing well after his friendship with Henry had soured to dislike, described him as "a silent and unmeddling member in Congress," with no strength as an administrator, who "had the good sense to perceive that his declamation . . . had no weight at all in an assembly as that. He ceased, therefore, in a great measure, to take part in the business."[36]

Henry served briefly as colonel of a Virginia militia regiment and commander-in-chief of the Virginia militia. But he was not wholeheartedly supported by the representatives in the Virginia Convention (he won the position by a narrow margin in a runoff election), and political infighting forced him to resign in March 1776. During Henry's troubled military tenure, George Washington opined that his "countrymen made a capital mistake, when they took Henry out of the Senate to place him in the field; and pity it is that he does not see this, and remove every difficulty by a voluntary resignation."[37]

In May 1776, Henry attended the Fifth Virginia Convention. Three sets of resolutions for independence were proposed, the most radical of which he wrote. Ultimately, a compromise

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[34] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 249-61; Beeman, Henry, 68-71; Meade, Henry, vol. 2, 44-56.

[35] Beeman, Henry, 67.

[36] Thomas Jefferson to William Wirt, 4 August 1805, in Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 34 (1910), 393; cited in Beeman, Henry, 72; Henry's inoculation is discussed in Mayer, Son of Thunder, 264-68.

[37] George Washington to Joseph Reed, 7 March 1776, cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 1, 345; see Mayer, Henry, 274-84, for a detailed account of Henry's military career.

resolution was adopted, incorporating the spirit of Henry's proposal but written in sufficiently moderate language that more conservative representatives could find it acceptable. Beeman, an insightful commentator on Henry's political career, writes, "although he had not penned the final product, Henry could with some justification take much of the credit for the decisive step the legislators had just taken. One is not exaggerating Henry's importance in asserting that he, more than any other individual in the colony, was responsible for leading public sentiment toward the position of independence."[38] A month later, the Convention approved the Virginia Constitution, and on the same day elected Patrick Henry to the post of governor of the sovereign Commonwealth of Virginia.

As governor, Henry administered the details of revolution. Virginia troops served in the continental line with Washington, and their wants had to be seen to. Yet every soldier sent to Washington was a soldier missing from Virginia, where the long frontier along the mountains and the vast coastline left the state vulnerable to attack from indians or the British. Henry tried to persuade the frontiersmen, with only moderate success, not to provoke the Cherokee and Shawnee, who were poised to take advantage of Virginia's preoccupation. Henry encouraged the schemes of George Rogers Clark, who came to him in August 1776 with a plan to pacify the backcountry and drive out the British. Henry supported Clark before the Virginia Assembly, and in 1779 the explorer's mission culminated in the conquest of the entire Northwest Territory.[39]

Recruitment and provision for the army occupied much of Henry's time. During the dreadful winter at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Washington several times appealed to Henry for assistance. In November, Henry used his emergency powers of impressment to secure nine wagonloads of woolen goods for the troops and later, bypassing the inefficient continental commissariat, Henry arranged for 10,000 pounds of beef and pork from the Shenandoah Valley to be driven on the hoof to Washington's camp. In 1779, after three years as Governor, and as the war moved steadily southward, Henry stepped down from office, relinquishing the governorship to Thomas Jefferson.[40]

Henry's retirement from office did not last long. Re-elected to the General Assembly, Henry served from 1779 until 1784, when he was again elected governor. Henry served two terms in the office, in 1784 and 1785, and then returned to the Assembly, where he served until 1790. In 1787 he declined appointment as one of Virginia's seven delegates to the Constitutional Convention; James Madison, writing to Washington, feared "that this step has proceeded from a wish to leave his conduct unfettered on another theatre, where the result of the Convention will receive its destiny from his omnipotence."[41] Madison's worry was justified, for in 1788, as a delegate from Prince Edward County, Henry led the opposition to the Constitution in the Virginia Ratifying Convention.

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[38] Beeman, Henry, 82.

[39] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 313-38, passim.

[40] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 311-339.

[41] James Madison to George Washington, 18 March 1787, cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 312.

Henry's opposition to the proposed new government was born out of his loyalty to and protectiveness of the interests of Virginia.[42] Henry feared that Northern influence would overwhelm Virginia in the new government. Already, in the Jay Treaty of 1785, a coalition of Northern states had threatened the commercial viability of the Virginia backcountry by attempting to surrender American claims to the right to ship goods down the Mississippi River. John Marshall wrote to Arthur Lee before the Constitutional Convention, "Mr. Henry, whose opinions have their usual influence, has been heard to say that he would rather part with the Confederation than relinquish the navigation of the Mississippi."[43]

At the convention, Henry couched his arguments in classic republican language. "I consider myself as the servant of the people of this commonwealth, as a sentinel over their rights, liberty, and happiness," he began. "This proposal of altering our federal government is of a most alarming nature: make the best of this new government--say it is composed of anything but inspiration--you ought to be extremely cautious, watchful, jealous of your liberty; for instead of securing your rights, you may lose them forever." Henry continued forcefully to the heart of his concern: "Who authorized [the authors of the Constitution] to speak the language of, We, the People, instead of We, the States? States are the characteristics, and the soul of a confederation. If the states be not the agents of this compact, it must be one great consolidated national government of the people of all the states."[44] Henry feared that under the new constitution, sovereignty would be wrested from Virginia and placed in the new federal government; and that Virginia would be submerged within the new union, and her interests disregarded.

The revolution in Virginia had not been a democratic one; it had been fought to preserve the rights of the Virginia Assembly from the usurpations of a central government in England, and to defend the rights and liberties of the Virginia elite from the perceived threat of English tyranny and corruption.[45] "The Virginia constitution of 1776," writes Beeman, "merely legitimized the destruction of royal power and strengthened the grasp of the provincial oligar-

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[42] This point is made forcefully in Beeman, Henry, 87-98, 135-63; see also Beeman, Old Dominion and the New Nation, 1-55. For larger discussions of the creation and ratification of the Constitution, see Wood, Creation, 471-564; the essays in Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edwin C. Carter II, eds., Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 1987); and Richard B. Morris' more celebratory account in The Forging of the Union, 1781-1789 (NY: Harper and Row, 1987), 298-322.

[43] John Marshall to Arthur Lee, in Lee, Life of Arthur Lee, vol. 2, 321, cited in Beeman, Henry, 140. Southern reaction to the proposed treaty is discussed in Drew R. McCoy, "James Madison and Visions of American Nationality in the Confederation Period: A Regional Perspective," in Richard Beeman, et al., eds., Beyond Confederation.

[44] Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 431-33.

[45] The major outlines of revolutionary historiography for Virginia derive from the work of Jack Greene. See Greene, Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689-1776 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1963); "Society, Ideology, and Politics: An Analysis of Political Culture of Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Richard M. Jellison, ed., Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York (NY: Norton, 1976): 14-76; "Political Mimesis: A Consideration of the Historical and Cultural Roots of Legislative Behavior in the British Colonies in the Eighteenth-Century," American Historical Review, 75 (1969), 337-60. A good synopsis of the historiography is Herbert Sloan and Peter Onuf, "Politics, Culture, and the Revolution in Virginia," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 91/XCI (July 1983): 259-84.

chy on the politics of the state." Henry, from his first years in political office, had struggled to attain elite status. Now, in 1788, the system of Virginia government seemed threatened. "Here is a revolution as radical as that which separated us from Great Britain," Henry cried. "It is as radical, if in this transition, our rights and privileges are endangered, and the sovereignty of the states be relinquished: and cannot we plainly see that this is actually the case?"[46]

Henry lost the debate. In a close 89-to-79 vote, the convention ratified the Constitution. A number of Antifederalist representatives, unwilling to accept defeat, attempted to enlist Henry's support in an effort to stop enactment of the new government, but Henry refused, standing by his public commitments. "If I shall be in the minority," Henry said, perhaps as a caution to his more volatile followers, "I will be a peaceable citizen. My head, my hand, and my heart shall be at liberty to retrieve the loss of liberty, and remove the defects of that system, in a constitutional way."[47] Yet, Henry's arguments had not been entirely in vain. Many of the Federalists in the convention, despite their vote, shared Henry's uneasiness with the new government, and the convention continued for several more days to discuss possible amendments to the Constitution. In the 1788 Virginia General Assembly, the Antifederalists commanded a sizable majority, while James Madison, to win his congressional seat in a race against James Monroe, had placed his considerable prestige behind a pledge to secure a Bill of Rights at the earliest opportunity.[48]

Henry, with the support of the Antifederalist majority, acted to weaken the position taken by firm supporters of the Constitution. Henry worked to remove from the assembly Edward Carrington, a close associate of Washington and Madison, on charges of misconduct. Later, Henry engineered the defeat of Madison in the Senate race, and worked in the house to gerrymander Madison's congressional district. "In short," Edmund Randolph wrote to James Madison, "nothing is left undone which can tend to the subversion of the new government."[49] Richard Henry Lee and William Grayson, prominent opponents of the constitution, represented Virginia in the first U.S. Senate.

Henry united with moderate Federalists in the Assembly to push for a second constitutional convention. On 30 October 1788, the Virginia Assembly joined New York in suggesting that the government's charter be amended. The Assembly prepared an address to the U.S. Congress, expressing in strong terms its distrust of the current, unamended constitution. It declared that "the slow forms of congressional discussion and recommendation, if indeed they

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[46] Beeman, Old Dominion, 28; Henry's speech of 5 June 1788 is cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 43S.

[47] Cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 590. This incident is discussed in Beeman, Old Dominion, 10-11; and in Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 412-13.

[48] Beeman, Old Dominion, 1-27; Norman K. Risjord, "Virginia Federalists," in Leonard W. Levy and Carl Siracusa, eds., Essays on the Early Republic: 1789-181S (Hinsdale, Il: Dryden Press, 1974): 79-104; Richard E. Ellis, "Persistence of Antifederalism after 1789," in Beeman et al., eds., Beyond Confederation, 295-314.

[49] Edward Carrington to James Madison, 1S November 1788, cited in Henry, Henry, 431; for a discussion of the gerrymandering of Madison's district see Tyler, Henry, 351-52. Quote is from Edmund Randolph to James Madison Jr., 10 November 1788, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond.

should ever agree to any change, would we fear be less certain of success," and requested that Congress initiate the call for a second convention to consider amendments.[50]

Antifederalist efforts to secure a second convention came to nothing despite the attempts of Virginia's delegation in Congress. "We might as well have attempted to move Mount Atlas upon our shoulders," wrote Senator Richard Lee bitterly to Henry. "In fact, the idea of subsequent amendments was little better than putting oneself to death first, in expectation that the doctor, who wishes our destruction, would afterward restore us to life."[51] Yet the Antifederalist opposition, with Henry a prominent leader, registered a powerful sentiment of unease with the suppotters of the new government, and forced Virginia's Federalists to moderate their attempts to further enhance the power of the central government.

Save briefly in 1799, when Henry responded to President Washington's pleas and stood for office one more time--just weeks before his death--Henry devoted his last years to land speculation, his legal practice, and his plantations--not to politics. Yet his political stock remained high in Virginia, and his retirement was periodically interrupted by various inducements to resume political office.

Henry participated in the Virginia assembly for the last time in 1790. William Grayson died in 1790, and Patrick Henry was offered his seat in the U.S. Senate. Henry remained suspicious of the constitution, and despaired of reforming it. "My mind revolts at the idea of accepting [appointment to the Senate]," he wrote. "I cannot find those dispositions within my heart which I deem necessary for all the confidential servants of the present government--some of its leading principles are subversive of those to which I am forever committed whilst its practices seem equally at variance with republican sentiment . . . . Could I believe that my poor efforts would work a change I would suffer any thing & go there--but the utmost which I see possible to effect is now & then to impear some of the lesser movements of the system whilst the radical errors will remain & be maintained by a determined majority."[52]

It was the first of many such invitations that Henry refused. In 1794 George Washington offered to appoint Henry ambassador to Spain, and a year later to positions as Secretary of State and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. In 1796, Virginia's Republican legislature elected Henry to a sixth term as governor. Henry declined them all.

Even in 1792, when only 56 years old, Henry's failing health was evident. "What a weight of worldly concerns rest upon this old man's shoulders?" asked Richard Venable in his diary. "His head now blossums to the grave, & his body bends to mingle with its kindred dust."[53] Henry cited his age to avoid political office. "Advanced age and decaying Facultys leave me

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[50] Beeman, Old Dominion, 14-21; See Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 423-28, for the complete address.

[51] R.H. Lee to Patrick Henry, 14 September 1789, cited in James C. Ballagh, ed., Letters of Richard Henry Lee, vol. 2, 501-04, as cited in Beeman, Henry, 170.

[52] Patrick Henry to J. Dawson, 20 March 1790, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

[53] "Richard Venable Diary, 1791-1792," 10 May 1792, 198-99, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

not to chuse, but impose upon me the necessity of declining this high Honor," he wrote to John Preston. "I should be happy," Henry said upon being offered the governorship, "if I could persuade myself that my abilities were commensurate to the duties of the office; but my declining years warn me of my inability."[54]

On 15 January 1799, George Washington--himself in retirement at Mount Vernon--appealed one last time to Henry. In the intense political contests of the late 1790s, Jeffersonian Republicans attacked the policies of John Adams's administration.[55] Writing with deep concern of "the endeavors of a certain party among us, to . . . arraign every act of the Administration" and "to set the people at varience with their Government," Washington urged Henry to resume political office. "I come now, my good Sir, to the object of my letter--which is--to express a hope . . . that you w[oul]d come forward at the ensuing Elections (if not for Congress, which you may think would take you too long from home) as a candidate for Representation, in the General Assembly of this Commonwealth."[56] Henry responded by standing for election as a representative from Charlotte County, and he appeared at Charlotte Court House in March to give the last speech of his career. "He was very infirm," a witness remembered, "at length he arose with difficulty, and stood somewhat bowed with age and weakness."[57] Henry won the election, but died before he could take office.

Henry's legal practice, which had been strong in the 1760-70s and had waned in the 1780s while he served as governor, was again profitable in the 1790s. He returned to the bar in 1786, but did not handle many cases until 1789, after moving to Prince Edward County and qualifying to practice there. "He was occasionally employed to argue causes of consequence, defending in distant courts," Edmund Winston recalled. His skill as an attorney was in such demand that "his clients were obliged to employ other counsel" to prepare for the trial, "for he would only argue their cases." Henry argued a number of controversial cases, representing Charles Carter of Shirley Plantation in 1789 and Richard Randolph in 1793, both of which brought in high fees. In 1791 Henry appeared in the case of Jones v. Walker, sometimes known as the British Debts Case, which further enhanced his legal reputation. In 1794, Henry wrote to his daughter, Elizabeth, "I must give out the law & plague myself no more with business"; but a year later he was still able to complain, "I have been obliged to resume my profession and go again to the Bar at a time of life too advanced to support the fatigue of

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[54] Patrick Henry to John Preston, 29 November 1796, cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 424; Patrick Henry to the Honorable Speaker of the House of Delegates, 29 November 1796, cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 574.

[55] John R. Howe, "Republican Thought and the Political Violence of the 1790s," in Levy and Siracusa, eds., Essays on the Early Republic, 44-62; Stephen G. Kurtz, "The Presidency of John Adams," in the same volume; and the extended discussion of "the crisis of 1798-99" in Robert H. Wiebe, Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion, (NY: Vintage Books, 1984), 3-125.

[56] George Washington to Patrick Henry, 15 January 1799, transcript in Robert Meade Files, Red Hill Archives, Virginia; original from "Huntington Library Film." An excerpt from this letter is in Tyler, Henry, 413-14.

[57] Account of John Miller, as cited in Tyler, Henry, 416.

it."[58] Through 1797, when his failing health made travel difficult, Henry continued his practice, but increasingly restricted it to friends and family.[59]

Patrick Henry died at Red Hill on 6 June 1799, after a lingering intestinal illness. He had devoted much of his life to becoming a Virginia gentleman planter; in the assembly and as governor, he had sought to protect the rights of his beloved Virginia. Henry's religious faith had intensified in the last decades of his life when, he believed, public virtue and religion had declined in Virginia. In Henry's will, at the conclusion of the long and precise instructions for the disposition of his estate, he piously wrote, "this is all the inheritance I can give to my dear family. The religion of Christ can give them one which will make them rich indeed." "Oh, that I may be enabled to imitate the virtues of your dear and honored father," his widow Dorothea wrote their daughter. "He met death with firmness and in full confidence that through the merits of a bleeding savior all his sins would be pardoned."[60]

Spencer Roane closed his memorandum describing Henry to William Wirt, disclaiming, "If my descriptions seem extravagant, let it be remembered that he was a most remarkable man. As for his public conduct and opinions, they are already before the world, who will judge of them."[61] Patrick Henry's son John, years later, echoed Roane's opinion with the words he had inscribed on Henry's gravestone: "His fame his best epitaph."

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[58] Edmund Winston Memorandum, undated, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress; Patrick Henry to Elizabeth Aylett, 8 September 1794, cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 424; Patrick Henry to George Washington, 16 October 1795, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

[59] Patrick Daily, Patrick Henry: The Last Years, 1789-1799 (Bedford, Va.: The Print Shop, 1986): 59-118; Meade, Henry, vol. 2, 398-424.

[60] Patrick Henry's will, cited in Morgan, Henry, 457; Dorothea Henry to Elizabeth Henry Aylett, undated [ca. June 1799], Henry Family Letters, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond.

[61] Spencer Roane to William Wirt, undated, as cited in Morgan, Henry, 484.

Chapter 2:

ECONOMIC LIFE

The lifeblood of colonial Virginia's economy was tobacco. The prosperity of the colony depended on the price of this staple--and after 1740, as tobacco prices rose--the fortunes of the colony improved. With increasing wealth, planters gained easier access to British credit, and by the 1760s owed substantial sums to creditors in the mother country. Planters invested in fine living, but they also improved their lands, driving up the price of property in long-developed areas and forcing settlement westward. Poorer folk moved to the Piedmont or Southside to plant tobacco, often working as tenants on frontier lands owned by gentlemen, hoping for the good crop that would permit them to purchase land and slaves and begin the long effort to achieve prosperity for themselves.[62]

Tobacco was produced on a fifteen-month cycle requiring performance of a sequence of steps at periodic intervals, each of which demanded painstaking care and judgment. About two weeks after Christmas, the tobacco seed was planted in specially prepared beds. In late March or April, when the planter judged the seedlings sufficiently large and hardy, they were replanted in the main fields. Throughout the summer the planter and his laborers weeded and "topped" the plants until, sometime in early fall, the plant was cut and the leaves moved to curing barns. After curing, the leaves were "stripped" and "stemmed," then "prized" into large wood hogsheads. Finally, sometime in early spring, the hogsheads were shipped (sometimes rolled) to market. Tobacco was hard on the land, for it utilized soil nutrients at a voracious rate, and new acreage had to be cleared every few years. Since each step in production was equally important there was no end to the cycle; planters were already working on the next crop as they prepared that of the previous season for shipment.[63]

The central importance of tobacco culture, combined with a received British heritage, molded the ideals of the Virginia gentry. Their consciousness, as historian T.H. Breen has demonstrated, was intimately shaped by the crop. Its cultivation required scrupulous care and not a little good fortune. Much hinged on the planter's good judgment. Recreation and most social events were planned around the growing and production cycle. By 1750, Breen argues, cultivation of the "sot-weed" had "acquired considerable symbolic significance in this society,"

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[62] The regions of Virginia are loosely defined according to topography: The Tidewater refers to the sandy, coastal plain east of the fall line of the major rivers, from Great Falls on the Potomac River to Richmond on the James. This area was the first settled by Europeans and throughout the colonial period was the seat of Virginia's wealthiest families. The region west of the Tidewater is the Piedmont, which extends from the Tidewater to the Appalachians. The Southside, really part of the Piedmont, refers to the southern tier of counties situated west of Richmond and along the valleys of the Staunton, Meherrin, Nottoway and Dan rivers. Right after the revolution, the Southside consisted of Amelia, Pittsylvania, Prince Edward, Halifax, Lunenburg, and Charlotte counties (the number of counties in the Southside increased throughout the late colonial and early national periods as population growth incouraged the formation of new jurisdictions from portions of the old). Other regions in Virginia include the Northern Neck and the Shenandoah Valley. See Alan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill, NC: Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 3-20, 118-61; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, The Economy of British America, 1607-1789 (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 35-88, 117-43.

[63] This process is described in detail in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 46-55; Isaac, Transformation, 22-30.

for "it came to represent not only a particular agrarian work experience, but also the people themselves, a collectivity of producers."[64]

Tobacco production was also labor intensive. There were few economies of scale in its production, so the only way to increase the crop was to put more work into it. Between 1740 and 1775, tobacco-growing regions in Virginia exported about 500 pounds per worker, while prices increased from about 1 penny per pound during 1700-40 to about 1½ pennies per pound in 1740-75. A yeoman farm family in 1760 might produce 1,500 pounds of tobacco, netting about £9 per year from its sale, and another £6 by selling corn.[65] Even after tobacco prices increased around mid century, a planter could achieve real wealth only by expanding the labor force devoted to his crop. In the seventeenth century, wealthy planters had largely accomplished this by purchasing indentured servants; but by the early eighteenth century, too few persons were willing to immigrate to work in the Chesapeake, so labor in Virginia was increasingly performed by slaves. By 1700 the ownership of slaves was a prerequisite for achieving wealth in the tobacco-growing south.[66]

As population increased and the Tidewater became settled, increasing numbers of people moved westward. Gentlemen used their wealth and connections to patent sizable tracts of western land; some speculators lost money, but many more reaped large profits, selling their patents to new settlers and reserving much of the best land for themselves. Many gentlemen developed frontier lands by leasing them to tenants, gaining dual benefits from the improvements that tenants made on the property and from the rents that they paid. Ownership of land became increasingly important as areas became more settled, forcing tenant farmers farther west as demand and improvements drove up rents and land prices. Settlement was encouraged by Scottish merchants who, beginning about 1750, opened stores throughout the backcountry, providing small growers with an alternative to the gentlemen who previously controlled the tobacco market. Areas of the Piedmont and Southside that in 1740 had been settled mostly by tenant farmers and yeomen--few of whom owned slaves--in the post-Revolution years were more and more inhabited by a slave- and land-owning class of yeoman planters. In Lunenberg County in 1750, 27 percent of the families owned a median of two slaves; forty-five years later, both the percentage of slave owners and the median number of slaves owned had doubled. In neighboring Charlotte County, 42 percent of the families owned a median of two slaves in 1764, while by 1790, 58 percent owned a median of four

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[64] Breen, Tobacco Culture, 58.

[65] Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 80, 121, 151; recent findings by Lorena Walsh suggest that Kulikoff's figures may be low, and that an individual worker could produce anywhere between 800 to 1,200 pounds of tobacco.

[66] Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 23-157; Richard S. Dunn, "Servants and Slaves: Recruitment and Employment of Labor," in Greene and Pole, eds., Colonial British America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 157-194. The debate over the origins of slavery is enormous, but see Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitude Toward the Negro, 1550-1812, (Chapel Hill, NC: , 1968); Edmund Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom (NY: Norton, 1975); T.H. Breen, "A Changing Labor Force and Race Relations in Virginia, 1660-1710," Journal of Social History 6 (1973): 3-25; Russell Menard, "From Servants to Slaves: Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System," Southern Studies 16 (1977): 355-90.

slaves.[67]

Maturation of the tobacco economy, rampant land speculation, and the emergence of the gentry encouraged the development of a legal profession. The ownership of land was registered in a variety of ways. Before the local community, it was made manifest by the public ritual of periodically walking the boundaries in a "procession" of local dignitaries; public ritual, however, only reinforced the legal claim to land which derived ultimately from the authority of the British monarch. Title to land was registered in deeds, which were kept and maintained in courthouses. The success of land speculation hinged on surveying the land and gaining title to it, and these processes could be and often were disputed. Further, the entire system of marketing tobacco turned upon credit, for there was very little specie in the colony. Debt was often publicly registered through lawsuits. As the practical workings of the economy became more complicated, and as the courts were increasingly used to mediate conflicting economic claims, demand for legal specialists increased. By the early 1730s the colonial Assembly took steps to regulate the profession.[68]

The great planters sold their tobacco crop, and often that of smaller neighbors, on consignment. Under this system, a planter shipped his crop to an individual firm in London or Glasgow, which acted as his selling and purchasing agent. Consignment firms marketed the planter's crop, and advanced him credit to sustain his purchases. Long-standing associations between Virginia planters and British consignment firms developed, and in the good years before the Seven Years' War when surging British trade created a great deal of wealth, much capital was advanced to Virginia tobacco producers. Because there was so much variability in tobacco production and the tobacco market, planters could not accurately assess the value of their crop until it had been shipped and sold. As a consequence, many planters were optimistic in their predictions of the value of their crop, and sank ever deeper into debt.[69]

The increasing indebtedness of the colonial gentry represented something of a paradox, for one ideal they espoused above all others was independence and personal autonomy. British culture had always valued personal independence, and in seventeenth-century political thought praised it as a central tenet of good society.[70] In Virginia, moreover, personal autonomy was highlighted by comparison with the situation of slaves. Free men of all social ranks staked their money and reputations in contests and competitions that ranged from horseracing and rough-and-tumble fighting to oratory and dancing, in an effort to gain public acclamation and

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[67] Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 141-61, especially Table 16, "Slaveholding in Piedmont Virginia, 1736-1815," p. 154; Richard B. Sheridan, "Domestic Economy," in Greene and Pole, eds., Colonial British America, 43-85; the Southside's economic development is discussed in Beeman, Evolution of the Southern Backcountry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 42-96, 160-185.

[68] On land ownership, see Isaac, Transformation, 19-22; on the Virginia legal profession, see A.G. Roeber, Faithful Magistrates and Republican Lawyers: Creators of Virginia Legal Culture, 1680-1810 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 32-111, and Kermit L. Hall, Magic Mirror: Law in American History (NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9-48.

[69] Breen, Tobacco Mentality, 84-123; overviews are provided by Marc Egnal, "Economic Development of the Thirteen Continental Colonies, 1720 to 1775," WMQ, 3rd ser., 32 (1975): 191-222; Jacob M. Price, "Transatlantic Economy" in Greene and Pole, eds., Colonial British America, 18-42; McCusker and Menard, Economy of British America, 51-88, 117-143.

[70] McDonald, Novus, 25-27, 70-75, 93-94.

emphasize the degree to which they were not dependent.[71] Yet each man's financial situation was private and, since income was so erratic, few could judge accurately the state of their finances at any given time. Gentlemen could put up an impressive front, living a life of display designed to convey to others their supreme independence, all the while sustaining it on borrowed money. So long as credit continued to flow, this contradiction could remain nascent.[72]

In the early 1760s, when British credit tightened, this contradiction between ideal and reality was revealed in all its ugliness. Tidewater planters felt betrayed by merchants who called in long-standing debts, and Virginia Treasurer John Robinson illegally advanced credit from public funds to a number of his struggling friends. The resulting scandal discredited several important entrenched political figures, and opened the way for younger men like Madison, Jefferson, and of course Patrick Henry, to achieve political prominence. In 1772 credit contracted even further. When British merchants called in a planter's debt they challenged his public image as a man of independence, and thereby challenged his implicit claim to authority. When this occurred with sufficient regularity to create a consciousness among many gentlemen that their collective authority was threatened, it heightened their sensitivity to English transgressions of all sorts, and made them much more willing to believe that metropolitan authority conspired against them. Patrick Henry, for one, remained hostile to British creditors throughout his career.[73]

After the American Revolution, tobacco production continued to hold a prominent place in Virginia's economy. Regional economic diversification had certainly increased, and a substantial amount of grain was produced in the areas drained by the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers. By the end of the 1780s, much of the Tidewater soil was exhausted and could no longer profitably sustain tobacco; then diversified farming increased there, as well. But the Piedmont, and especially the Southside, remained committed to tobacco production. After the revolution, when dislocations in the tobacco market had subsided, the Piedmont accounted for almost half of Virginia's crop. In contrast, Piedmont tobacco had made up only about one-quarter of the crop exported prior to the American Revolution. In the 1790s, the French Revolution again depressed the tobacco trade, reducing Piedmont output by 40 percent, while exports from Tidewater lands north of the James River declined to almost nothing. After 1800, when the market began to recover, production was centered in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee; and only the central Virginia Piedmont and Southside contributed to

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[71] Isaac, Transformation, 94-104, 118-20; Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," WMQ, 3rd ser., 34 (1977): 239-257; Elliot Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Snatch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry" in David Nasaw, ed., The Course of United States History, Vol 1, To 1877, (Chicago: Dorsey, 1987): 181-201.

[72] Breen, Tobacco and Slaves, 84-123.

[73] Breen, Tobacco Mentality, 124-59; Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 127-131. Established scholarship has shown that Virginia planters did not support revolution in order to clear their debts, as progressive historians once argued. But Breen's argument, as explicated above, does not contradict this. For comparison, see Emory G. Evans, "Planter Indebtedness and the Coming of the Revolution in Virginia," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., XIX (1962); and Evans, "Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., XXVIII (1971).

U.S. tobacco exports to any substantial degree.[74]

Patrick Henry was very much a part of this economic pattern. He got his start through his law practice, which in the 1760s and early 1770s provided him with sufficient capital to invest in good tobacco land and in slaves. By the time that he married his second wife in 1777, he owned thirty slaves, and her dower of a dozen more made Henry a prominent planter indeed. By comparison, in Richmond and Middlesex counties in the early 1780s some 67 percent of the households owned slaves, with the median holding being six slaves. Henry continued to purchase slaves throughout his life, owning 66 by 1782. He paid taxes on thirty-two adult slaves and six slave adolescents in 1790, a number which had almost doubled nine years later, when he was taxed for fifty-four adult hands and eight youths. When he died and his Red Hill estate was inventoried there were sixty-six slaves living there, and he likely owned almost an equal number at his Campbell and Halifax county plantations.[75]

Henry quickly became involved in land speculation. In 1766 he paid off a number of his father-in-law John Shelton's debts, in exchange for which he received title to 3,300 acres of western lands and Shelton's place in a land company headed by a number of experienced speculators. Two years later he purchased shares in another company organized by members of the governor's council, but also including his brother William, brother-in-law William Christian, and Thomas Jefferson in a venture to patent and sell some 50,000 acres along the Ohio River. In 1771, Henry purchased at a good price the excellent plantation called Scotchtown in Hanover County.[76]

Even during the Revolution Henry continued to speculate in western land. In 1779 he took out patents on 10,000 acres of land in Kentucky. In 1778 he sold his estate at Scotchtown for £5,000 and purchased land in Henry County that eventually amounted to approximately 14,000 acres. He used much of this land to provide for his children by his first wife, Sarah Shelton. In 1779 he gave 2,000 acres to his son-in-law, John Fontaine. Fifteen years later he divided the greater part of the rest of the tract, giving 1,000 acres to the estate of deceased son John, 1,937 acres to Edward Henry, and 1,200 acres to William Henry.[77]

Henry continued to buy land in Kentucky through the 1780s, purchasing at least another 5,500 acres, and perhaps as much as 12,100 acres. Toward the end of the decade, he purchased extensive lands in North Carolina and began to investigate speculative deals on a

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[74] Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 157-61.

[75] Beeman, Henry, 109; Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 137; under Virginia law, slave property was taxable; adult slaves (age 17 and older) and youths (12-16) were taxed, along with other "personal property" that included horses, and carriages. Henry's slaveholdings were compiled from the Personal Property Tax Lists of Campbell, Charlotte, Halifax, Henry, and Prince Edward counties, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond. Henry was taxed for thirty-four slaves at Red Hill in 1799, while the assessors who inventoried the estate totaled sixty-six. If this ratio held for Henry's other plantations, he owned a total of perhaps 120 slaves.

[76] Beeman, Henry, 109; Mayer, Henry, 116-24.

[77] Henry's holdings in Henry County have been meticulously researched by Blunt, Henry, 30-37. See also Daily, Henry, 40-58. Daily's presentation--while it appears to be based on adequate research--is confusing and vaguely documented; it should be supplemented by mentions of Henry's land transactions in the Meade and Mayer biographies.

grand scale on the Georgia frontier.[78]

We can ascertain with some confidence the scale of Henry's North Carolina speculations in 1785, for he left a memorandum (in the event of his death) describing them to his executors. That year he owned some 25,750 acres of "land in Carolina" in partnership with George Eliot and John Fontaine, of which he reckoned perhaps 15,750 acres were his. Eliot had purchased for Henry another 9,000 acres near the South Carolina border on the "Waggamaw" River. In addition, Henry mentioned two smaller tracts, totaling some 2,500 acres, in Pasquotank County and an unspecified location, and a share of land purchased in the Great Dismal Swamp at the Virginia-North Carolina border. Henry concluded by figuring his total holdings at 23,250 acres, but if his itemized figures are accurate, he actually owned closer to 27,000 acres.[79]

In 1789, Henry and a group of his wealthy Prince Edward County neighbors formed a partnership to speculate massively in land on the Georgia frontier. Calling themselves the Virginia Yazoo Company, they petitioned the Georgia legislature for the sale of 11.4 million acres. The Georgia legislature agreed to sell the land to the company for $93,741, which the state was to accept in the form of much-depreciated Georgia Revolutionary War loan-office certificates. In 1791 the state reneged on its agreement and demanded payment in specie, which the company was unable to provide. The Virginia Yazoo Company claims lingered on for a number of years in the 1790s, but the machinations of rival companies and corruption in the Georgia legislature conspired against the Virginia company's interest, and in 1795 the state sold Virginia Yazoo's claims. Henry most likely made a considerable profit from the deal, however, since Alexander Hamilton's plan to assume state Revolutionary War debts meant that the Georgia certificates Henry and his associates had purchased at depreciated rates would be redeemed at face value. Jefferson, for one, believed that Henry's Georgia speculations explained his conversion to Federalist positions in the 1790s.[80]

In the early 1790s, Henry began to purchase working plantations in Virginia's Southside, with an eye to enhancing his children's inheritance. He assembled, through a series of transactions, two major plantations: Long Island in Campbell County, encompassing 3,522 acres, and Red Hill in Charlotte County, which eventually consisted of 2,965 acres. Both estates contained highly valued bottom land along the floodplains of the Staunton River. The Red Hill land was especially rich, consistently assessed as some of the most highly taxed land in its county. In 1797 Henry put into motion plans to purchase a smaller working farm of 1,400 acres at Seven Islands, in Halifax County, across the Staunton River from Red Hill. These lands were not purchased as speculations, but rather were worked by slaves under the supervision of resident white overseers. In 1799, Henry owned thirty-two taxable slaves at Red Hill, twenty-one at Long Island, and nine at Seven Islands. The plantations were successful businesses,

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[78] On Henry's Kentucky purchases see Meade, Henry, vol. 2, 421; the higher figure is reported by Daily in Henry, 42, but the latter author does not specify his sources.

[79] "Patrick Henry Memorandum," 5 September 1785, Henry and Henry Family Papers (sec. 3, folder 43), "Notes," Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

[80] Daily, Henry, 47-56; Beeman, Henry, 182-84.

and in the last year of Henry's life Red Hill produced 20,011 pounds of tobacco, Long Island 17,454 pounds, and Seven Islands 8,668--for a total annual crop of 46,133 pounds.[81]

In 1797, Henry purchased 6,314 valuable acres of rich agricultural land located along the Dan River in North Carolina. Known as the "Saura Town" tract, the plantation was located due south of Henry's former Leatherwood plantation. This fertile tract was closer to the frontier, and evidently Henry did not feel it was worth managing as a working plantation. It was not purchased with speculation in mind, however, for Henry was developing it in a time-honored fashion: in May 1800, less than a year after Henry's death, the land produced £752 (Virginia currency) in the rents due from forty-three tenants. Henry's agent, writing to his widow Dorothea, noted that "the rents of the estate are due on the 12 Dec[ember] but we never can collect the money till near this time of the year as the tenants depend on the sale of tobacco for the payment and they hardly ever get that article at market till in the spring." Tenant farmers struggled to bring in the tobacco crop in north-central North Carolina, replicating an economic and social process that initiated the Southside's settlement sixty years earlier. In due time, the Saura Town land provided the inheritance for two of Henry's sons.[82]

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[81] For the acquisition of the Red Hill and Long Island estates see Daily, Henry, 13-24, 56-7; Meade, Henry, 426, 433-37; taxable slaves are found in the Personal Tax Records for Halifax, Campbell, and Charlotte counties, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond; land-assessment rates are found in land-tax records (available on microfilm for all Southside counties) Jones Memorial Library, Lynchburg, Virginia; "Memorandum of Tobc. sent to Mr. Ad. Campbell in Richmd," 25 February 1799, Meade Files, Henry Large Files, Red Hill Archives, Virginia.

[82] "Rent list of the Saura Town Estate for the year 1800," enclosed in letter, unknown correspondent to Dorothea Henry, 26 May 1800, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress; Transcript of Patrick Henry's Will, in Morgan, Henry, 455-89. For a discussion of tenant farming and economic development in a tobacco economy, see Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 131-61.

Chapter 3:

LEGAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

In the Chesapeake, a stable political elite did not begin to coalesce until the turn of the eighteenth century. A prolonged crisis in the tobacco trade, lasting from perhaps 1680 to 1720, and the late seventeenth-century decline in the supply of indentured servants, encouraged the transition to slave labor and emphasized the difference in wealth between those with access to unfree labor and those without. At the beginning of the eighteenth century disparities in wealth increased; the rich, who could afford to purchase slaves, grew richer, while the poor, who could not, remained poor. At the same time, demographic conditions improved considerably; familial lines strengthened and developed, allowing fathers to pass on their wealth and status to sons.[83]

By 1730 a distinct class of wealthy planters, distinguished by the ownership of large numbers of slaves and substantial plantations, controlled political life in the counties. "Justices, sheriffs, and assemblymen," reports one historian, "formed an almost hereditary caste by the mid eighteenth century."[84] Between 1756 and 1776, some 1,600 men were appointed as justices of the peace in Virginia; of these, more than 420 were members of just fifty-five families. Seventy-five percent of the justices were provided by no more than 300 to 400 families.[85] Stable planter oligarchies, interrelated by marriage, were by 1750 an elite and politically commanding group within Virginia.

These gentleman planters dominated almost every aspect of the society they ruled. They controlled the local economy, not only because they were major slave holders and thus directly controlled much of the colony's labor, but also because, for much of the century, they managed the export of tobacco for many of their poorer neighbors. After 1732, the gentry regulated tobacco production through tobacco-inspection warehouses. They also controlled access to most of Virginia's communal institutions. They dispensed justice to the rest of society, served as vestrymen in the local parishes, occupied the most prominent pews in church, led county militia, and represented their counties in the colonial legislature at Williamsburg. Through a firm grasp on the colony's political apparatus, the gentry further enhanced their economic security by speculating in western land, reserving the best land for

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[83] There is a vast literature on this transition. See especially Morgan, American Slavery; Bernard Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," in James M. Smith, ed., Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial America (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1959); Darret B. and Anita H. Rutman, A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750, (NY: Norton, 1984); John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, Economy of British America, 1985), 117-43, 242-45. For surveys of the historiography, see Gary B. Nash, "Social Development," in Jack Greene and J.R. Pole, eds., Colonial British America, 242-7; and Thad W. Tate, "Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake and its Modern Historians," in Tate and David L. Ammerman, eds., Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society (Chapel Hill, NC: Norton, 1979), 3-50.

[84] Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 275.

[85] Charles Sydnor, American Revolutionaries in the Making: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia (NY: Free Press, 1952), 64.

themselves and thus ensuring the continuation of their economic power. Their houses became centers of display and consumption, and their famous hospitality served not only to cement reciprocal relations of patronage and deference between the gentry and their lesser neighbors, but also to highlight the cultural difference between themselves and the society they ruled.[86]

Gentry status depended upon wealth, which in Virginia meant the ownership of slaves. Wealth sufficient to sustain independence and insulate the possessor from manual labor was requisite for being a gentleman, but ultimately being gentry meant aspiring to a certain lifestyle, and acquiring the wherewithal to carry it off. "There is no lack of evidence," historian Jack Greene writes, "that [the gentry] consciously asserted their social superiority over and marked themselves off from the rest of society by their fine dress, splendid 'equipages,' stately houses, 'polish'd conversation,' genteel bearing, and increasingly sumptuous life style." "Appropriate demeanor, dress, manners, and conversational style were essential," concurs historian Rhys Isaac, for a man's claim to gentry status to have been generally accepted. Gentlemen proclaimed their status with a lavish display of wealth and hospitality, aggressive assertion of manliness and personal prowess, and by surrounding themselves with servants in an appropriately grand domestic setting.[87]

The gentry dominated mid eighteenth-century Virginia culture, but they were not unchallenged. The social hierarchy that their display emphasized was reinforced by religion, for like aristocratic society, the Anglican church also symbolized hierarchy that culminated, through duly ordained and licensed clergymen and bishops, in the person of the King of England. In Virginia, where the gentry was oriented toward individual independence, prowess, and achievement, the church was as much a political and social institution as religious. "Church-going in colonial Virginia had more to do with expressing the dominance of the gentry than with inculcating piety or forming devout personalities," writes Isaac. Gentlemen valued the Anglican church because it was a community forum that emphasized their authority, both in the theological content of its liturgy and in the forms of its practice.[88]

This kind of religion might be satisfying for those at the top of Chesapeake society, but it did not meet deep emotional needs for great numbers of slaves, white indentured servants and yeoman farmers. During the late 1730s and 1740s, a mild awakening of dissenting "new light" Presbyterians on the Virginia frontier threatened the Anglican establishment, but neither Samuel Davies, a leading Presbyterian minister, nor Lieutenant Governor William Gooch, desired a confrontation, and the Presbyterians were accommodated within Virginia gentry culture with more or less ease. Indeed, Patrick Henry's mother, Sarah Winston, was deeply influenced by Davies, and the Winstons became one of Hanover County's more prominent

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[86] Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics," 15-35; Breen, Tobacco Culture, 32-39; Sydnor, American Revolutionaries, 60-85; Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 261-300; Isaac, Transformation, 11-138, passim; McCusker and Menard, Economy, 117-43.

[87] Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics," 18; Isaac, Transformation, 131.

[88] The relationship of religion to politics in eighteenth-century British colonial America is discussed in David D. Hall, "Religion and Society: Problems and Reconsiderations," in Greene and Pole, Colonial British America, 317-44; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 18-35, 70-98, 104-05, 113-19, 184-93, 314-29; Patricia U. Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America (NY: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Isaac, Transformation, 120.

Presbyterian families. Dissenting Baptist sects, which gathered strength in Virginia in the 1760s, posed a greater threat, for the denomination sternly rejected almost every convention of gentry society. Baptists included slaves in their congregations (a profoundly threatening step, because it implied that theologically blacks and whites were equal), and renounced conviviality, dancing, gambling, display, and indeed, all forms of social hierarchy. Many gentlemen found the Baptist challenge deeply menacing, and to small avail exerted their authority to repress the sect. The existence of popular religious sects like the Baptists suggests that gentry hegemony was by no means secure, and that the gentry were not completely successful in imposing their model of correct society upon the people of Virginia.[89]

Eighteenth-century Virginia gentlemen entered colonial politics after protracted "apprenticeships" in a county office. "Election to the parish vestry, appointment to a militia post, or inclusion in the commission of the peace were all worthy aims for the man with political ambitions, but the most important of these was a justiceship of the peace." Justices stood at the heart of Virginia's system of local government and law, and exercised considerable authority in regulating the lives of county residents. Further, the county court--which was composed of a quorum of a county's justices sitting collectively--appointed most other positions of importance within that jurisdiction. While the governor theoretically had the power to appoint as justice whomever he chose, by the mid eighteenth century the justices had established the practice that the governor only appointed persons to the court who were recommended by current justices. The county courts were the fundamental institution whereby the gentry maintained control of politics--isolated from the influence of the vast body of people whose lives they regulated, these courts were the preserve of Virginia's landed elite. Service as a justice of the peace was generally the first important step in a gentleman's public career.[90]

Patrick Henry, however, did not enter politics in the typical fashion. His father, whose genteel manners and education permitted him access to gentry society while he lived at Studley, was a justice of the peace, militia officer, and Anglican vestryman in Hanover County, although he did not serve in office after the move to Mount Brilliant. Henry's mother was the daughter of Isaac Winston, one of the county's leading families. Henry thus had strong family connections. But the loss of Studley plantation crippled John Henry's finances, and while Patrick Henry made a good marriage, he started his adult life as a simple tobacco farmer. He owned six slaves when he was first married; at the time, 76 percent of central Virginia planters owned slaves and the median ownership was six slaves. He did, perhaps, have good prospects, but he was still merely a prosperous yeoman farmer who worked the ground with his own hands--hardly a 'gentleman planter' and not, at least at this point in his life, the stuff of which county justices were made.[91]

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[89] For a discussion of the first great awakening in Virginia, see Bonomi, Cope of Heaven, 181-86; Isaac, Transformation, 143-77, 243-98; William G. McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform, 48-97, but esp. 89-96; and the classic account by Wesley M. Gewehr, Great Awakening in Virginia (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1930).

[90] Sydnor, American Revolutionaries, 74-88.

[91] Mayer, Henry, 19-80; Beeman, Henry, 1-10; Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 186.

When Patrick Henry established his legal practice, he established the potential for his political career, for it showcased his impressive speaking ability. His forceful oratory made lasting impressions--as it would continue to do throughout his life--and attracted the attention of local gentlemen. "My father, a burgess from Essex from 1768 to the Revolution, and once or twice during the war, always came home in raptures about the man," remembered Spencer Roane. "He contrived to be the focus to which every person present was directed," Edmund Randolph recalled. "He transfused into the breasts of others the earnestness depicted in his own features, which ever forbade a doubt of sincerity." Indeed, Henry's oratory resembled that of the evangelical dissenting ministers whose plain-but-powerful style of preaching had so attracted his mother. "This enthusiasm was nourished by his partiality for the dissenters from the Established Church," Randolph continued. "He often listened to them while they were waging their steady and finally effectual war against the burdens of that church, and from a repetition of his sympathy with the history of their sufferings, he unlocked the human heart and transferred into civil discussions many of the bold licenses which prevailed in the religious." Gentlemen were receptive to the evangelical style when it was exercised on their behalf, and Henry's oratory evoked strong positive responses.[92]

His most famous case was the Parson's Cause, where Henry defended the interests of a prominent local gentleman, Thomas Johnson. Henry's law practice, hitherto struggling, after that case blossomed. More important, the Parson's Cause initiated a relationship between Johnson and Henry that had lasting consequences. Henry's finances improved considerably after 1763, and in 1764 he moved to a comfortable four-chamber house on Roundabout Creek in Louisa County, situated on 1,700 acres of good tobacco land and not coincidentally less than a mile from Johnson's seat. In Louisa County, on the central Virginia frontier in the 1760s, Henry's increasing prosperity would have been noticeable: he probably owned one of the few wood-frame dwellings in a county dominated by log cabins, although his house did not compare to Johnson's "Roundabout Castle." With the latter's influence exerted on his behalf, Henry was elected to the House of Burgesses in 1765.[93]

Henry spent much of the next eleven years working to enhance the position that Johnson's patronage and his own forensic skill had attained. In 1769 Henry applied for and received a license to practice before the General Court, the highest in Virginia. The move reduced Henry's caseload considerably and improved his income. Henry took in some £2,800 in legal fees between 1769 and 1771, a net that placed him well on his way to becoming one of Virginia's more substantial gentlemen. Indeed, Henry was so successful before the General Court that prominent attorney Robert Carter Nicholas turned over his practice to Henry when Nicholas became colonial treasurer in 1773. While his legal practice was booming, Henry also began what was to be a lifelong preoccupation with land speculation. In 1766 he purchased some 3,300 acres of western lands from his father-in-law, John Shelton, and in 1769 Henry bought into the Ohio Company, an investment that would ultimately turn a handsome profit.

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[92] Randolph, History, 179-80; Spencer Roane Memorandum, undated, cited in Morgan, Henry, 442. The argument that Henry embodied the evangelical style of the dissenting preachers is made in Isaac, Transformation, 266-69.

[93] Mayer, Henry, 69-70; Beeman, Henry, 11-32. For a description of the Virginia frontier, see Beeman, Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

In 1771, Henry purchased a gentleman's estate in Hanover County, encompassing 960 acres of rich farmland, upon which sat Scotchtown, former Speaker of the House John Robinson's mansion house. Henry continued to purchase slaves during these years; he owned thirty when he remarried in 1777, and sixty-six unfree laborers by 1782. Five years later, Henry possessed more than 20,000 acres of land and ranked as one of the 100 wealthiest men in Virginia. He at last had become a gentleman planter in his own right.[94]

Henry's drive to achieve a position among the inner circle of gentlemen politicians in Virginia coincided with fundamental changes in the structure of Virginia politics. After 1763, gentleman politicians throughout the American colonies were increasingly drawn into conflict with British authorities in London. The cluster of notions and assumptions about how politics ought to work, and about what the correct constitutional relationship between the colonies and Great Britain should be, shaped the ways in which these men understood and responded to the complex pattern of British actions after the end of the Seven Years' War. Many American leaders found the ideas of the British commonwealth opposition to be especially persuasive, so much so that one historian speaks of "a general idiom of eighteenth-century British opposition politics." They feared that centralized, monarchical authority in England would come to overshadow the lords and commons in the hitherto balanced English constitution, in the process undermining British liberties in the colonies. And they came to perceive that such a transformation of legitimate constitutional monarchy into unlawful tyranny was happening in England, as one law threatening traditional colonial liberties after another was enacted. Finally, in 1774 when England forcibly closed the port of Boston, the colonist's worst fears were confirmed.[95]

According to this idiom of political thought, the health of the government and the liberties of the people depended upon the virtue of the citizens. Power and liberty were antithetical principles. The one tended to expand at the expense of the other, and the erosion of liberty could only be prevented by the constant vigilance of virtuous citizens.[96] Historian Forrest McDonald has successfully captured this viewpoint. "Public virtue," he writes, "entailed firmness, courage, endurance, industry, frugal living, strength and above all, unremitting devotion to the weal of the public's corporate self, the community of virtuous men. It was at once individualistic and communal: individualistic in that no member of the public could be dependent upon any other and still be reckoned a member of the public; communal in that every man gave himself totally to the good of the public as a whole. If public virtue declined, the republic declined, and if it declined too far, the republic died."[97] "Brutus," writing in the Virginia Gazette in 1769, worried about how this decline might occur. Luxury and idleness, he wrote, "bring on a general deprivation of manners, which sets us loose from all restraints

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[94] Beeman, Henry, 26-32, 109; Mayer, Henry, 116-28; Jackson Turner Main, "The One Hundred," WMQ, 3rd ser., 10 (1954): 363-83.

[95] See the thorough discussion of colonial republicanism in Bailyn, Origins. Morgan, Birth of the Republic provides a solid brief account of the revolution and its antecedents; quote is from Breen, Tobacco Culture, 8.

[96] Bailyn, Origins, 55-59.

[97] McDonald, Novus, 70-71.

of both public and private virtue, and diverts our thoughts from examining the behavior and politics of artful and designing men, who mediate our ruin. . . . From immorality and excesses we fall into necessity, and this leads us to a servile dependence upon power, and fits us for the chains prepared for us."[98]

To those for whom this idiom made sense as a means of interpreting their world (which included almost every one of the patriot leaders during the Revolution), the genius of the British system of government was that it balanced the competing interests of the king, aristocrats, and people. "Conceiving of liberty," argues historian Bernard Bailyn, "as the exercise, within the boundaries of law, of natural rights whose essences were minimally stated in English law and custom, the colonists saw in the balance of powers of the British constitution 'a system of consummate wisdom' that provided an effective 'check upon the power to oppress.'"[99] Yet even within the balanced British constitution, power was not completely contained and opposition theorists feared that corruption at the English court and in the halls of Parliament threatened the traditional liberties of Englishmen everywhere. The colonial commitment to republicanism was revolutionary in the older sense of the word, for it did not entail so much the rejection of the English constitution, as the hope that the constitution could be restored by purging it of corrupting influences.

This republican idiom meshed easily with the social structure that had developed in Virginia since the beginning of the eighteenth century. For, while the commonwealth thought promised a society in which individual virtue and equality of independence were the basis of social relations, Virginia gentlemen considered themselves the natural pinnacles of their society, and stressed their moral right to rule. Indeed, the notion of public stewardship was primary in the pre-revolutionary gentry ethic. "In the best tradition of the English country gentlemen, " historian Jack Greene remarks, "the Virginia gentry labored tirelessly at the routine and tedious business of governing . . . not primarily to secure the relatively small tangible economic rewards they derived from their efforts but rather to fulfill the deep sense of public responsibility thrust upon them by their position in society." The agrarian republicanism of the Southern colonies expressed confidence that widespread ownership of land would preserve public virtue. "In sum," McDonald writes, "ownership of land begat independence, independence begat virtue, and virtue begat republican liberty." The gentry, who owned vast lands, were confident they embodied the best characteristics of a virtuous republican citizenry. Patrick Henry had no need to reconcile a commitment to republican government with his commitment to the Virginia social order, for no contradiction existed. Henry's republicanism was thus actually quite conservative, since it entailed less the desire to change social and political relations in Virginia than to preserve the existing order from a perceived outside threat.[100]

During the years in which Henry was rising to gentry status, he was also building a reputation

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[98] Virginia Gazette, 1 June 1769, cited in Breen, Tobacco Culture, 11.

[99] Bailyn, Origins, 79.

[100] Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics," 29; McDonald, Novus, 74-75. Bernard Bailyn, et al., The Great Republic: A History of the American People, vol. 1 (Lexington, Ma.: Heath, 1977), 292-97.

for himself as a radical politician, and he certainly subscribed to the opposition idiom. Speaking against Joseph Galloway's proposal at the first Continental Congress, to reconcile the colonies to England within the imperial framework, Henry stated derisively, "We shall liberate our constituents from a corrupt House of Commons, but throw them into the arms of an American legislature, that may be bribed by that nation which avows, in the face of the world, that bribery is a part of her system of government."[101] Or consider his language during his famous "liberty or death" speech. "The question before the house is one of awful moment to this country," he stated. "For my own part I consider it nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery." The armed occupation of Boston by British soldiers was proof of British designs. "Has Great Britain any enemy in this quarter of the world, to call for this accumulation of navies and armies? No sir, she had none. They are meant for us: they can be for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry have been so long forging."[102] These are the classic concerns of the English commonwealth opposition, fear of central authority, corruption, and a standing army, applied to explain the circumstances of British policy before 1776, and to argue for particular colonial responses.

Henry's "radicalism" was radical only within the context of Virginia politics. Tidewater gentry leaders--Peyton Randolph, John Robinson, and Edmund Pendleton among them--had achieved a long-standing working accommodation with royal authority by the 1760s. As the conflict with Great Britain escalated, these men sought to preserve the harmony they had maintained for so long, and were reluctant to pursue more vigorous responses to British actions until every avenue for reconciliation had been explored. Henry, on the other hand, entered politics just as the conflict intensified--and, unfamiliar with the habits of long- accommodated and established leadership--saw no reason not to press for more decisive action. In the 1770s, he and a number of other younger burgesses challenged the positions of older Tidewater leaders. Yet neither Henry nor the gentry leaders of the 1760s desired any fundamental change in the Virginia political system that worked so well to maintain the political and social hegemony of landed gentlemen.[103]

The American Revolution placed these gentleman patriots in a cultural and political quandary. On the one hand, they had justified their right to govern society in their own interest on the basis of their cultural, intellectual, and moral superiority. But on the other hand, their revolution demanded extraordinary sacrifice, not simply from the politically active gentleman who made the decision to seek independence from Great Britain, but also from the great mass of yeoman citizens. It was the yeomanry, after all, who would provide the common soldiers to fight the war and bear much of the financial cost to sustain the Revolution.[104]

The gentry responded by opening political authority to lesser land-holders, and by muting the

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[101] Cited in Tyler, Henry, 116.

[102] Wirt, Henry, 138-42.

[103] Beeman, Henry, 53-S4, 82-8S.

[104] Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 300-13.

ostentation of their display, emphasizing instead the solidarity of Virginia society. Gentlemen and the sons of gentlemen eschewed their fancy militia uniforms for the attire of the yeomanry. Spencer Roane, for example, the scion of a gentry family, had been "a volunteer at age 13, armed with a short carbine and tomahawk, and clothed in a hunting shirt with the words 'Liberty or Death' engraved in capitals over my left breast." "On the principle of noblesse oblige, the gentlemen . . . were setting an example of valiant patriotism," notes Rhys Isaac.[105] In 1774, in Hanover County where Patrick Henry and his half-brother, John Syme, dominated political proceedings, substantial yeomen and minor gentry served on the local revolutionary committee alongside the established, wealthier men. "Newcomers included two Presbyterians who had served on the jury in the Parson's Cause a dozen years earlier and several freeholders of modest means."[106]

During the Revolutionary War, the seeming solidarity of Virginia society--expressed with such promise by gentlemen in hunting shirts in 1774--was considerably strained. Yeomen responded to notions of popular sovereignty implicit in the republican commonwealth idiom by demanding greater participation in political decision making. "A flurry of petitions on every important issue of the day began to reach the Virginia House of Delegates soon after the Revolution began," historian Allan Kulikoff reports. "These documents differed from earlier petitions of planters that asked for county or parish divisions, for they attempted to advise and even instruct their representatives on public issues." Indeed, by 1788 the notion that it was proper for constituents to instruct their representatives had become sufficiently widespread that Patrick Henry could invoke it against his political rival James Madison. "Thus, gentlemen, rejoined Mr. Henry, the secret is out, it is doubted whether Mr. Madison will obey his instructions." The gentry, who had originally exempted overseers from military service, were forced to abandon the exemption in 1776, and by the end of the war had relinquished their control of the process of selecting men to serve in militia units or the Continental army. The exigencies of a war to defend the traditional social and political order had wrought considerable changes in the authority of Virginia's gentleman planters, and the place of gentlemen in the society that emerged from the war was much altered from that of before.[107]

After the Revolution, gentlemen and their families gradually changed their style of life. The wide-open hospitality of former years grew more restrained and selective, while at the same time the cultural ideal shifted from ostentatious display to what one might call republican gentility. Gentlemen could no longer comfortably assert their primacy through rituals that asserted their wealth, for such rituals now carried connotations of metropolitan corruption and vice. Rather, they self-consciously sought to be models of republican virtue, displaying manly fortitude, independence, frugality, and moderation. At the same time, as their utopian vision of agrarian society failed to emerge, gentlemen increasingly subscribed to an ideal of behavior that stressed refinement and subdued gentility. Houses became the private preserves of individual families, and internal spaces were subdivided and assigned a specific function.

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[105] Spencer Roane's Memorandum, in Morgan, Henry, 442; Isaac, Transformation, 255-60, 256.

[106] Mayer, Henry, 235.

[107] Edmund Randolph to James Madison, 10 November 1788, cited in Henry, Henry, 427-28. On gentry appeals to the yeomen, see Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 309-12.

Within the domestic sphere, social interaction increasingly emphasized the privacy of the family and the individual. "All of the physical functions," says Isaac, "defecation, urination, bathing, sexual relations, even eating--came under new codes of behavior that emphasized privacy, or, in the case of eating, refinement."[108] The Virginia gentry, Henry foremost among them, retained its grip upon political society after the Revolution, but only at the cost of minimizing the ostentation and lifestyle that previously had separated them from the "vulgar herd" and had legitimated the exercise of their authority.

Henry was soon identified with the populist challenge to traditional gentry authority. Much of his political strength derived from his ability to appeal to common people as well as to gentlemen. "To Patrick Henry the first place is due, as being the first who broke the influence of that aristocracy," Edmund Randolph wrote. "Identified with the people, they clothed him with the confidence of a favorite son."[109] In the 1760s, when he was still ascending toward gentry status, Henry had been closely associated with religious dissenters, providing them legal counsel in a number of actions arising from the attempts of Anglican gentlemen to silence itinerant preachers. Earlier, he had assisted Quakers with their exemption from military service, earning praise as "a man of great moderation."[110]

Henry had been a prominent leader in the effort to engage the support of yeomen in the cause of independence. In the heady days after his "Liberty or Death" speech, Henry had been conspicuous by his efforts to create an independent Virginia militia, and when Governor Dunmore seized the gunpowder at Williamsburg, Henry had been the gentleman who took decisive action. Governor Dunmore issued a proclamation condemning Henry and his "deluded followers" for "exciting the people to join in these outrageous and rebellious practices."[111] Henry had likewise been one of the gentlemen leaders who organized meetings to "get the sense of the counties" prior to the Virginia convention of August 1774, bringing significant numbers of yeomen into politics for the first time. John Randolph warned against the excesses of democracy in July 1774, seeking to undermine support for the radicals. "The Populace, from Freak, or Interest, are ever ready to elevate their Leader to the Pinnacle of Fame; and Experience informs us, that they are as ready to pull him down. . . ." At least one historian construes Randolph's remarks as a veiled reference to Patrick Henry, and his popularity among the Virginia yeomen.[112]

Late in his career Henry was accused of being a demagogue by a young man with aristocratic airs, who had been conspicuously abroad in the years of the Revolution. Henry offered an eloquent reply that utilized his popular image as a man of the people both to defend himself

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[108] Isaac, Transformation, 303, 273-322; also Beeman, Evolution of the Southern Backcountry, 170-85; Henretta and Nobles, Evolution and Revolution: American Society, 1600-1820, (Lexington, Ma.: Heath, 1987), 174-78, 241-46.

[109] Randolph, History, 178.

[110] Mayer, Henry, 159-61.

[111] Dunmore's proclamation is published in Tyler, Henry, 162-63.

[112] Mayer, Henry, 193-204. John Randolph's appeal is cited in Mayer, Son of Thunder, 196.

and to embarrass his opponent. "I am a plain man," Henry said, "and have been educated altogether in Virginia. My whole life has been spent among planters, and other plain men of similar education, who have never had the advantage of that polish which a court alone can give."[113] Spencer Roane remembered the incident. Henry "spoke and acted his reply," Roane wrote, while his opponent "sank at least a foot in his chair."[114] Henry perhaps exaggerated the differences between himself and his adversary, but the effectiveness of his riposte depended upon the notion that participation in politics by a "plain man" was legitimate, and indeed, that to suggest otherwise was shameful.[115]

There is some justice to this image. Henry consistently backed debtor interests. In 1784, he opposed an increase in Virginia taxes, arguing that it would create considerable hardship among the backcountry yeomen. In 1784 and 1785 he placed his influence against proposals to amend the Virginia legal code so British creditors could begin to recover their debts, despite provisions in the Treaty of Paris in 1783 that specifically required such legal obstructions be removed. In 1791, and again in 1793, he was part of the legal team that successfully argued before the federal court in Richmond that action to recover British debts be denied. Further, Henry's political style had a distinctly populist bent; his oratory was calculated "to find access to the hearts of a popular assembly," and opponents consistently throughout his career condemned him for raising the "passions" of the people. Henry was as comfortable arguing his position before a crowd of yeomen and tenants as he was in the more rarified councils of the gentry; time and again he preceded an appearance in the Assembly or at a convention with an appearance before a local constituency.[116]

Yet despite his reputation as a demagogue, Henry did not advocate an end to hierarchical political forms, nor did he support democratic government. His support of debtor interests, after all, benefited large planters as much as small, and may have stemmed from pre-Revolutionary antipathy to British merchants as much as from his concern for constituents. Henry was certainly willing to use popular opinion to sustain his politics. Yet while there is every reason to believe he was sincerely concerned with the welfare of his constituents, such a concern was by no means out of line with gentry notions of stewardship. He was one of a number of politicians from the western part of Virginia who came to power in the years preceding independence, and his rise--to the extent it signified a change in the composition of Virginia's political leadership--represented a shift within the ruling elite, not the democratization of Virginia politics. As Beeman perceptively notes, Henry "simply increased his wealth and prestige until he, too, had a legitimate claim to the economic power, with its consequent social elevation, that was the prerequisite for political power." In 1776, Henry was one of the foremost supporters of the new Virginia constitution, which maintained the political and judicial structure of the county courts, and thereby maintained gentry political hegemony.

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[113] Wirt, Sketches, 322-23.

[114] Spencer Roane Memorandum, in Morgan, Henry, 436.

[115] For prerevolutionary gentry attitudes toward the non-gentry, see Sydnor, American Revolutionaries, 34-43.

[116] Randolph, History, 180; Beeman, Henry, 119-21; Beeman, "Democratic Faith of Patrick Henry," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 9S:3 (July 1987): 301-16.

Indeed, the most fundamental changes instituted by the document reinforced the position of the gentry oligarchy by reducing the power of the chief executive. Henry was not a spokesman for democratic government in 1776, nor would he be in the 1780s and 1790s, when Virginia was adjusting to the aftermath of Revolution.[117]

After the Revolution, Henry became increasingly concerned that the citizens of Virginia lacked sufficient virtue to ensure the survival of republican government. During the later years of the war, when much of the fighting occurred in Virginia, desertion from military units became a chronic problem, while the rapid depreciation of Virginia's currency undermined popular support for the government. Henry was especially concerned with war-time profiteering by merchants and Virginia collection agents. Yeoman support for the Revolution diminished, to the dismay of Henry and other gentleman leaders.[118]

Further, the Anglican church underwent a precipitate decline. Article No. 16 of the Virginia Bill of Rights had emphatically re-enacted provisions of the English Act of Toleration, stating that "all men should enjoy the free exercise of religion"; religious dissenters, who had previously been subject to gentry repression, took the article as license to practice their chosen religion. With the resurgence of Baptist and Presbyterian worship, and with the Anglican church crippled by its popular and theological association with Great Britain, church attendance (and maintenance) dropped. Many Anglican ministers, required by oath to support the English monarch, emigrated from Virginia during and after the war. "The demoralizing effects of the war left religion and the church in a most deplorable condition. The Sabbath had been almost forgotten, and public morals sadly deteriorated," wrote a disheartened Presbyterian minister, Dr. William Hill, remembering the effects of the Revolution. George Mason, ever conscious of the fragility of republican order, expressed his concern to Henry in 1783. "Justice and virtue are the vital principles of Republican Government; but among us a depravity of manners and morals prevails, to the destruction of all confidence between man and man."[119] In the early 1780s Henry supported measures to strengthen established religion, but encountered obdurate resistance from the dissenters. In late 1784, Henry was elected governor of Virginia for the fourth time, and without his strong House leadership, Madison and Jefferson were able to pass legislation enacting religious freedom.[120]

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[117] Beeman, Henry, 98, 97-134. It should be noted that Beeman and Mayer, Henry's most recent biographers, differ markedly on this issue. For Mayer, "Henry was a new man in politics, the son of an undistinguished family who . . . brought a newer, more plebeian element into the political coalition required to oppose the British ministry. . . . Within the old, aristocratic forms of colonial politics, then, Henry's success heralded the changes that would shape the more democratic politics of the half century that followed independence" (p. xiv). While Mayer's argument is nuanced, Beeman is more persuasive, at least in part because Beeman creates more room in his account for contingency. In Beeman's view, Henry integrated a popular political style with a conservative political philosophy; democratic results stemmed from the exigencies of action, rather than from conscious intent. See Beeman's recent discussion in "The Democratic Faith of Patrick Henry," 301-16.

[118] Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 312-13, 423-28; Beeman, Henry, 116.

[119] Dr. William Hill, cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 203; George Mason to Patrick Henry, 6 May 1783, as cited in Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 185.

[120] Mayer, Henry, 359-64. For a perceptive account of the dispute over established religion in Virginia and its political importance, see Isaac, Transformation, 243-322.

Henry's opposition to the constitution likewise signaled his increasing identification with the gentry oligarchy. Many of his objections stemmed from his experience during the Revolution. The Revolution had been fought, and fought successfully, to protect the privileges of the gentry from the insidious designs of a British centralizing authority; now it was proposed that the sovereignty of Virginia be surrendered to an American central government. "Among other deformities, it has an awful squinting," Henry heatedly argued during the debate. "It squints toward monarchy! . . . Your president may easily become king; your Senate is so imperfectly constructed, that your dearest rights may be sacrificed by what may be a small minority." "We are come hither," Henry said earlier, "to preserve the poor commonwealth of Virginia, if it can possibly be done: something must be done to preserve your liberty and mine." To Madison's suggestion that sovereignty under the constitution would be divided between the national government and the states, Henry replied with mocking scorn, "this government is so new, it wants a name! I wish its other novelties were as harmless as this. We are told, however, that collectively taken, it is without an example!--that it is national in this part, and federal in that part, etc. To all the common purposes of legislation, it is a great consolidation of government. . . . But, sir, we have the consolation that it is a fixed government! That is, it may work sorely in your neck; but you will have some comfort by saying, that it was a federal government in its origin!"[121] Throughout the debates, Henry maintained his focus on the deleterious effect the proposed national constitution would have on the constitution of Virginia.

During the debate, Henry refused to consider the possibility of a sovereign United States. "Country" or "nation," in Henry's usage, always referred to Virginia. Henry objected that Congress would have both control of the armed forces and the power to levy taxes. "Shall we be safe without either?" he asked. "Unless a miracle in human affairs shall interpose, no nation ever did or ever can retain its liberty after the loss of the sword and the purse." It was Virginia's liberty whose loss Henry feared. Later, seething with sarcasm, Henry suggested, "Abolish the legislatures at once. What purpose should they be continued for? Our legislature will indeed be a ludicrous spectacle--180 men, marching in solemn farcical procession, exhibiting a mournful proof of the lost liberty of their country, without the power of restoring it." This sarcasm provides insight into Henry's preferences, for it presupposes an ideal. In Henry's formulation, liberty, sovereignty, and the Virginia legislature were equated. "The humble genius of Virginia has formed a government, suitable to the genius of her people," Henry said. His opposition to the constitution arose logically ftom his loyalty to that government and to the political society whose interests it represented, of which he had struggled to become a part in the years prior to and during the revolution.[122]

In the years following the ratification of the U.S. constitution, many of Henry's fears were realized. Alexander Hamilton's economic program, introduced in the U.S. Congress in 1790, proposed that the national government assume responsibility for the payment of state Revolutionary War debts, and that continental certificates be redeemed at par value. Assumption was a particularly dicey issue, since the motive behind it was more political than

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[121] Wirt, Sketches, 290, 297, 306-07.

[122] Wirt, Sketches, 302, 307; Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 486; Wiebe, Opening of American Society, 21-34.

financial; Hamilton wanted to bind the national union together more closely by making the states more dependent upon the national government. Further, most Virginian political leaders believed their state had successfully liquidated its debt and, indeed, Virginia had made great strides toward doing so. While almost all Virginia politicians agreed that the continental debt should be redeemed, few believed that the speculators who had purchased continental certificates at drastically depreciated prices should be allowed the same compensation as original government creditors.

Many of Virginia's political leaders saw in the operation of the national government the adoption of policies they considered contrary to the interest of their state and of the institutions in their state that preserved their own predominance. The creation of centralized American financial institutions (a funded national debt and a central bank) on the English model was particularly disturbing to men who feared corruption in a too-powerful central government. "A vast monied interest is to be created," wrote Richard Henry Lee, Virginia's Antifederalist senator, to Patrick Henry in 1790, "that will forever be warring against the landed interest, to the destruction of the latter." In the same year, Henry Lee, one of Virginia's staunchest Federalists, wrote, "Henry is already considered a prophet, his predictions are daily verified--his declarations with respect to the division of interests which would exist under the constitution and predominate on all the doings of the government already have been undeniably proved."[123]

Yet Henry retired from politics in 1790--at the moment when his concerns were seemingly confirmed. His decision stemmed in part from a desire to focus his remaining energies on procuring sufficient patrimony for his growing family; but it is also clear that he grudgingly recognized that the national government was firmly entrenched, despite his best efforts. In early 1791, Henry wrote a long letter to James Monroe making clear his resignation to the national government. "Altho' The Form of Governt into which my Countrymen determined to place themselves, had my enmity, yet as we are one & all imbarked, it is natural to care for the crazy Machine, at least so long as we are out of Sight of a Port to refit." Henry condemned Hamilton's program, observing "Subserviency of Southern to N----n Interests are written in Capitals on its very Front," but argued that threats from abroad made necessary adherence to the constitution, despite its faults. "Accounts here say, there is to be a sad combustion in Europe," he wrote from his Prince Edward seat, making reference to the accelerating unrest in France. "But I live so much secluded that my Intelligence is from Sources not to be rely'd on."[124]

In Virginia the popular demands made possible by the necessities of revolution had been kept in check by the gentry. But the French Revolution presented a picture, it seemed to many American leaders, of democracy run amok. Where Antifederalists (transformed by the mid-1790s into the Democratic-Republican party of Jefferson and Madison) feared the corrupting

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[123] Richard Henry Lee to Patrick Henry, 10 June 1790, in Henry, Henry, 420-22; Henry Lee to James Madison, 3 April 1790, cited in Beeman, Old Dominion, 77. For a general discussion of national and state economic policies, see Jensen, New Nation, 302-26; and Beeman, Old Dominion, 56-89.

[124] Patrick Henry to James Monroe, 24 January 1791, cited in Henry, Henry, 459-62.

central authority so emphasized in republican theory, Federalists feared the anarchy they presumed would result from unstructured popular government. The French Revolution again crystallized these fears, and the different theories of government that resulted from them. "The Federalists," historian Gordon Wood writes, "thought of themselves as the most enlightened and socially established members of the natural aristocracy, who by their very respectability were best able to carry out the responsibility of ruling the country." But Democratic-Republican notions of correct government challenged the existing structure, and the Federalists remained committed to their vision of political society. Democratic-Republicans organized popular societies throughout the states to mobilize popular sentiment behind their political vision, in the process creating the first American political party. As war erupted between France and Great Britain, tension in the United States rose to heights unseen since the American Revolution.[125]

In the political context of the 1790s, Henry's opposition to Federalist policies softened. George Washington worked hard to bring Henry into his administration, offering him positions as Ambassador to Spain, Secretary of State, and Supreme Court Justice. Henry was clearly flattered by Washington's attention. "Believe me sir," he wrote the president, "I have bid adieu to the distinction of federal and antifederal ever since the commencement of the present government." Henry also was influenced by the seeming disorder introduced by the conflict between Democratic-Republicans and Federalists, for he assured Washington that "if my country is destined in my day to encounter the horrors of anarchy, every power of mind and body which I possess will be exerted in support of the Government under which I live." The continuing antipathy among Henry, Jefferson, and Madison may also have contributed to his increasing Federalist leanings (in 1799 Jefferson would write of Henry "his apostasy must be unaccountable to those who do not know all the recesses of his heart").[126]

Yet, in 1796 Henry was unwilling, even to his family, to be known as a Federalist. "As to the reports you have heard of my changing sides in politicks, I can only say they are not true," he wrote his daughter Elizabeth. "I am too old to exchange my former affections which have grown up into fixed habits of thinking." And perhaps to his mind he was not shifting his political allegiances. His loyalty had always been to Virginia, and not to a particular political party, and the source of the gravest threat to social order in Virginia still seemed to be the declining virtue of the people. "The enemy we have to fear is the degeneracy, luxury & vice of the present times," he wrote in late 1796. "The happiness & liberty of our country will be shortlived if the national manners do not undergo a change & become assimilated to the

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[125] Wiebe, Opening of American Society, 67-109; Bailyn, et al., Great Republic, 351-60; Wood's statement is in Bailyn, et al., Great Republic, 357; on late eighteenth-century politics see Henretta and Nobles, Evolution and Revolution, 197-220; John R. Howe, "Republican Thought and the Political Violence of the 1790s," in Levy and Siracusa, eds., Essays on the Early Republic, 144-60; and Richard E. Ellis, "The Persistence of Antifederalism after 1789" in Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edwin C. Carter II, eds., Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity, (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 295-314.

[126] Patrick Henry to George Washington, 16 Oct. 1795, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress; Thomas Jefferson to Archibald Stewart Stuart, 14 May 1799, Stuart Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. On the antipathy of Jefferson and Henry see Beeman, Henry, 132-33, 186-87.

republican character."[127]

It was only in the elections of 1798-99, when the domestic political crisis was reaching its peak, that Henry associated the threat to Virginia virtue with the events in France. In an open letter to Archibald Blair written in support of the candidacy of John Marshal, Henry gave full support to the Federalist position. "But as to France," Henry wrote, "her conduct has made it the interest of the great family of mankind to wish the downfall of her present government . . . and whilst I see the dangers that threaten ours from her intrigues & her arms I am not so much alarmed, as at the apprehension of her destroying the great pillars of all government & of social life I mean virtue, morality, & religion." The social radicalism of the French Revolution, in which social and religious hierarchies had been decisively rejected, were gravely disturbing to men who, like Henry, were committed to an American version of gentility. "So long as our manners and principles remain sound there is no danger. But believing as I do, that these are in danger, that infidelity in its broadest sense under the name of philosophy etc. . . is fast spreading and that under the patronage of the French manners & principles everything that ought to be dear to man is covertly but successfully assailed."[128]

Henry's political career, as historian Richard Beeman has demonstrated, was never marked by ideological consistency. He adapted his logic to the particular political context; Edmund Randolph noted that, "arguments which at first seemed strange were afterwards discovered to be select in their kind, because adapted to some peculiarity in his audience." Yet his political career was neither whimsical nor random, for he was guided throughout his life by his loyalty to Virginia, and to the gentry that controlled its politics. He was in the forefront of efforts to create wide-based support for the revolution, and in the process helped pave the way for the end of hierarchical social and political order to which he was committed. (Ironically, it was the aristocratic Jefferson who reaped the benefits of populist politics.) His was an extraordinarily conservative attempt to preserve a social order that was already changing as he achieved prominence within it, and indeed, his efforts to forestall perceived threats to that order only accelerated the rate at which change occurred. In 1796, perhaps recognizing the degree to which he was trapped in a web of unintended consequences, Henry wrote to his daughter, "my wish is to pass the rest of my days as much as may be, unobserved by the critics of this world, who would shew little sympathy to the deficiencies to which old age is so liable." Only the urging of his beloved President Washington brought him forth from retirement.[129]

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[127] Patrick Henry to Elizabeth Aylett, 20 August 1796, Extract, Henry Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia; Patrick Henry to Wilson Cary Nicholas, 29 November 1796, Patrick Henry Letters 1778-1799, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond.

[128] Patrick Henry to Archibald Blair, 8 January 1799, Patrick Henry Letters 1778-1799, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond.

[129] Beeman, Henry, xii-xiii, 46, 60-61, 163, 186-87; Randolph, History, 180; Patrick Henry to Elizabeth Aylett, 20 August 1796, Excerpt, Henry Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

Chapter 4:

DOMESTIC LIFE

"In the American colonies," writes historian James Henretta, "the family was ultimately the center of authority." Families provided the fundamental units in the social hierarchy; as in the larger society, internal family structure was marked by gradations in status. Authority was vested in the father who, in the ideal, was surrounded by a dutiful wife, children, and servants. The wife was legally and culturally subordinate to the husband. William Blackstone, noted English jurist, says in his 1765 Commentaries, "in marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband." Children were brought up to accept these norms--young women were taught "always to present themselves through their natural beauty and delicate nature as man's agreeable companion," while young men were raised to "become self-reliant, competitive, and economically independent."[130]

This ideal was intensely patriarchal. William Byrd II, who projected his social domination of local society through Westover, his great Georgian mansion on the James River, wrote in 1726: "I have a large Family of my own, and my Doors are open to Every Body, yet I have no bills to pay, and half-a-Crown will rest undisturbed in my Pocket for many Moons together. Like one of the Patriarchs, I have my Flocks and my Herds, my Bond-men and Bond-women, and every Soart of trade amongst my own Servants. . . ."[131] For Byrd, social authority over the larger society surrounding his plantation was intimately connected with his domestic authority over his wife, children, and servants. In Byrd's vision, independence, hospitality, and male authority were integrated in one fantastic idyll.

Yet, while Byrd's description *was* fantasy, important aspects of it were explicitly supported by Virginia's legal system.[132] The head of the household was considered a "father-king" over his dependents, and assaults upon his status were punishable as "petit-treason." A Virginia legal manual of 1736 defines the crime: "I. Where a Servant kills his master . . . II. Where the Wife kills her Husband. . . . The son killing his Father . . . is guilty of Petit Treason if he receives Meat, Drink, or Wages."[133] Indeed, the planters in the colonial Chesapeake, like the gentry of England, legitimated their social authority by stressing the analogy between the master-husband, father to his family; the king, father to his realm; and God, father to his

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[130] James A. Henretta and Gregory H. Nobles, Evolution and Revolution: American Society, 1600-1820, 79, 84; See the discussion of Lucy and William Byrd's marriage in Daniel Blake Smith, Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 166-68. Smith discusses extensively cultural values and child rearing for young men and women, 55-125. Blackstone quote is from Smith, 66.

[131] Isaac, Transformation, 39.

[132] Isaac, Transformation, 39-42.

[133] George Webb, The Office and Authority of a Justice of the Peace . . . , (Williamsburg, VA, 1736), 346, cited in Isaac, Transformation, 20.

people. When Henry, in his last political speech in 1799, referred to George Washington as "the father of his country," he was invoking a metaphor for legitimate authority that had considerable resonance in Chesapeake society.[134]

Byrd's sentiments were echoed by Patrick Henry in 1794, when he wrote to his daughter to tell of his intention to retire from his legal practice. "I must . . . plague myself no more with business, sitting down with what I have, for it will be sufficient employment to see after my little Flock, & the management of my plantation."[135] Indeed, Henry spent much of his life attempting to set up himself--and afrer him his sons--as a planter-patriarch, like his father had been at Studley. Henry Mayer, Patrick Henry's most recent biographer, notes that when Henry moved into the governor's mansion "the domestic circle familiar to Henry from his youth--the peerless male surrounded by admiring women and a shadowing cluster of servants--had reconstituted itself."[136] It was a domestic lifestyle that Henry would maintain for the rest of his life.

Henry lefr behind him very few documents that illuminate his personal life. One revealing letter written to his daughter, Anne, shortly after her marriage to Spencer Roane, provides some insight into Henry's domestic beliefs, however. When a man marries a woman, Henry wrote, "If he be a good man, he expects from her smiles, not frowns; he expects to find her one who is not to control him--not to take from him the freedom of acting as his own judgment shall direct, but one who will place such confidence in him, as to believe that his prudence is his best guide." Independence was a male, not a female, characteristic; men, not women, were responsible for the economic welfare of the family and for the family's civic participation within the larger society. Henry advises Anne, "cultivate your mind." "History, geography, poetry, moral essays, biography, travels, sermons, and other well-written religious productions," were suitable fare for a gentleman's wife, for they "will not fail to enlarge your understanding, to render you a more agreeable companion, and to exalt your virtue." Above all, Henry emphasized Anne's dependence upon her husband. "What can a woman gain by her opposition or her indifference? Nothing. But she loses everything; she loses her husband's respect for her virtues, she loses his love, and with that, all prospect of future happiness." Anne's role as Roane's wife was confined to the house; she was to bear his children, to supervise the domestic affairs of his household, and provide him with diverting, "agreeable" companionship.[137]

Roane was, in 1785, a promising young politician, and Henry recognized that his political prospects depended in part upon his local "connection." Thus, for Roane, a reputation as an hospitable man with an orderly house would be a political asset. "Your husband's success in his profession will depend upon his popularity," Henry advised his daughter. "The manners of

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[134] Wirt, Henry, 409. Patriarchy as a defining model of society is discussed in Isaac, Transformation, 20-94, passim; Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost 3rd edn. (NY: Scribners, 1965), 1-21; Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves, 165-204.

[135] Henry to Elizabeth Aylett, 8 September 1794, cited in Henry, Henry, 424.

[136] Mayer, Henry, 326.

[137] Henry to Anne Henry Roane, [1786], in Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 305-09.

his wife will have no little influence in extending or lessening the respect and esteem of others for her husband, [and] you should take care to be affable and polite to the poorest as well as the richest."[138] The planter's house was a center of political activity, and to that extent social/political (male) and domestic (female) spheres of work were joined. The manner in which Roane kept house mattered for his relations with other men, and thus for his political career. Little had changed since the days of William Byrd II; in Henry's vision, authority exercised within the larger society was rooted in authority exercised at home.

Henry's notions of domestic order are further revealed in his handling of the cross examination of Carter Page, Archibald Cary's daughter, in the Richard Randolph murder trial of 1793. Henry "saw the necessity of breaking down her testimony," writes William Wirt Henry, who relates the story. "The witness testified that her suspicions had been aroused concerning the lady involved, and being on one occasion in the house with her, she had attempted to satisfy her curiosity by peeping through a crack in the door of the lady's chamber, while she was undressing." Patrick Henry "at once resorted to his inimitable power of exciting ridicule by the tones of his voice," and asked, "Which eye did you peep with?" "The laughter in the court-room aroused the anger of the witness, which was excited to the highest pitch when Mr. Henry turned to the Court, and exclaimed in his most effective manner: 'Great God, deliver us from eavesdroppers!' The court no longer heeded her testimony."[139] Such a strategy could only be effective in a culture where women were relegated to a subordinate, protected status within the household, and where the activities of women within their sphere were considered petty, vacuous or devoid of serious content.

Yet the relegation of women to a separate sphere of activity represented a change from the cultural norms predominate earlier in the eighteenth century. The status of women within the household became more defined, and they assumed an important role as the keepers of the sanctity of the home. Male patriarchs still considered women to be their natural dependents, but notions of "republican motherhood" valued women for their role in raising virtuous (male) citizens. The rituals of gentry society became more refined, and women assumed a larger role in conducting them. Teas drinking, for example, (and it is significant that Patrick Henry owned an expensive silver tea service) was a ritual of genteel sociability in which the hostess played a significant role. "Refinement," notes Rhys Isaac, "like the domesticity with which it was associated, expressed an increasingly felt need to shield individuals from close interaction with an enveloping social world, a world that was now held to be impure and vulgar." Henry's daughter Martha exhibited aspirations to genteel society as "The Muse of Leisure Hours," writing a number of sentimental poems in the 1790s. "Thou art the sweetest flower of May/Around thee all the graces play/While in thy lovely radiant eyes/Little Cupid laughing lies . . . ," she penned in 1794, carefully noting at the end, "Lines written by Martha Catherina Henry 12 years of age, addressed to Miss Anne Everard Belling." "[Henry's] daughters played on musical instruments," recalled Roane. They no doubt using the valuable "fortepeano" listed

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[138] ibid.

[139] Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 492.

as part of Henry's estate when an inventory was taken in 1802.[140]

Throughout his adult life, Henry was surrounded by children. Henry's six children by his first wife, Sarah Shelton, were born between 1755 and 1771. His three eldest daughters and his sons William and John were married or established by 1790, while Henry continued to worry about his sickly son Edward, the youngest child of his first marriage, through the early 1790s. Four of these children pre-deceased their father: John died in 1791; Edward in 1794; William in 1798; and Anne in 1799, just months before her father. Martha and Elizabeth were still living when Henry died.

Henry's family by his second wife, Dorothea, was larger, and included seven children 15 years old or younger when the family moved to Red Hill in 1793; in all, she bore eleven children between 1778 and 1798, with nine surviving past infancy. The two eldest daughters, Dorothea and Sarah, were 15 and 13, respectively, in 1793, and Martha Catherina was 12. They no doubt provided welcome assistance to their mother in looking after the younger siblings. Although three were married between 1795 and 1799, the Henry household in the last year of his life contained seven children.[141]

There may have been other children there, as well, for Henry's sister Anne died in late 1789 or early 1790 and left her offspring orphans. "Johnny I propose to keep and send to a public school as soon as his age shall render it proper," Henry wrote in 1790. In the early 1790s, the Patrick Henry family lived near the residence of Henry's eldest daughter, Martha Fontaine, whose husband John died in 1792. The families took advantage of their proximity to provide proper schooling to Martha Hale "Patsey" Fontaine, Henry's granddaughter. Henry reported to Anne Roane in 1788 that "little Patsey lives at our house and is taught with your little sisters by Mr. Morris." There is, however, no indication that this arrangement continued after 1793, when the Henry family moved to Long Island, and then to Red Hill.[142]

Henry arranged his daughters' marriages to prosperous gentlemen who could maintain a style of comfortable and refined living. "My daughter Annie was married to Mr. Roane, one of the Council, last month, and Betsy to Mr. Aylett this month," Henry wrote to his sister. "The matches are agreeable to me, the gentlemen having good fortunes, and good characters." He provided each of his daughters substantial dowries, assisting the young couples materially at the start of their marriage, as his fathers-in-law had done for him. In his will he left each of his daughters by his second wife £1,000, and provided that they "be made equal in their negroes," in order that they might make advantageous marriages; Henry was likewise generous with the children by his first marriage, who in 1799 were themselves married. "I have

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[140] Henretta and Nobles, Revolution and Evolution, 174-78; Isaac, Transformation, 303, 302-05; Rodris Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," in Robert Blair St. George, ed., Material Life in America 1600-1860 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 439-62; Poem by Martha Catherina Henry, 28 June 1794, Henry Family Papers, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond; Spencer Roane Memorandum, transcript, in Morgan, Henry, 438; Patrick Henry Estate Inventory, transcript, in Morgan, Henry, 464.

[141] Genealogical files, Red Hill; Sarah Winston Genealogy, Appendix I, Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 633-45.

[142] Henry to Col. William Fleming, 3 July 1790, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, cited in Daily, Henry, 10; Henry to Anne Roane, 15 June 1788, Meade Files, Red Hill, cited in Daily, Henry, 12.

heretofore provided for the children of my first marriage, but I will to my daughters, Roane and Aylett, £200 each as soon as my estate can conveniently pay it by cropping."[143]

Henry sought to provide for his sons the resources to become like himself--independent planters, fathers, and masters. His concern is evident in the attempts to provide for his sickly son, Edward, who died in 1794 at age 23. In 1792 Edward, then living with Colonel Thomas Madison, paid court to Sally Campbell, the daughter of a wealthy planter. "I shall be better pleased to see him independent by his own industry than ever so rich by the favor of any person he might marry," Henry wrote. "I must turn him loose to shift for himself, after giving him a plantation and some negroes at Leatherwood this fall." Henry endeavored to leave each of his sons by Dorothea the means to be "independent of his own industry"; in a codicil to his will, he wrote "the Red-Hill estate, Long Island estate, and the Saura Town estate will furnish seats for my six sons by my wife." These lands (6,314 acres at Saura Town, 4,365 acres at Red Hill and Seven Islands, and 3,522 acres at Long Island) provided a substantial patrimony to his children; earlier, Henry had divided his lands in Henry County, totaling almost 14,000 acres, between his children by his first marriage. As he lay dying in 1799, Henry could reflect that he had done his duty to his children. He had, to the best of his ability, provided good matches for his daughters and landed estates for his sons, entrusting his daughters to the care of substantial, independent gentlemen, and providing his sons the means to achieve that same status for themselves.[144]

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[143] Henry to Annie Christian, 20 October 1786, Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 379-80; Patrick Henry Will, Morgan, Henry, 4S6-S8.

[144] Henry to Thomas Madison, 19 Sept. 1792, as quoted in Henry, Henry, vol. 2, 479; see Charles P. Blunt IV, Patrick Henry: The Henry County Years (Danville, Va: Blunt, 1986), 31-36, for disposition of the Henry County (Leatherwood) lands. Henry's other holdings are described in Meade, Henry, vol. 2, 421-24, n. 43, 519-20; Daily, Henry, 40-S8. A transcript of Henry's will has been published in Morgan, Henry, 4SS-S9.

Chapter 5:

DWELLINGS AND LAND

Eighteenth-century America was colonial British America. "Colonial status," argue historians Jack Greene and J.R. Pole, "meant that no matter how distant [the colonies] might be from Britain or how much latitude they may have had in their internal development (notwithstanding different countries of origin), they were all cultural provinces of Britain whose legal and social systems, perceptual frameworks, and social and cultural imperatives were inevitably, in large measure, British in origin and whose inhabitants thereby shared a common identity as British peoples living in America." The colonies, they suggest, shared a common developmental framework: initially colonists struggled to establish themselves in America, in the process simplifying inherited British social and cultural forms; only later did they elaborate such forms, a developmental phase that "thus involved the articulation of socioeconomic, political, and cultural institutions, structures, and values that . . . were usually highly creolized variants of those found in the more developed areas of Britain." As social structures became more established and stabilized in the colonies, they entered a third stage, one of social replication. "In this phase, members of the strategically placed elite who, by the late colonial period, almost everywhere dominated and gave tone and definition to their societies, displayed a keen desire to recreate British society in America and took pride in the extent to which their societies were becoming increasingly Anglicanized."[145]

In the Chesapeake, a stable elite did not establish itself until well into the eighteenth century. By the 1720s stable planter oligarchies, similar in many respects to the "county societies" of England[146], began to separate themselves culturally from the mass of the Virginia yeomanry. Colonial elites legitimated their status to themselves and to the people they ruled by assuming the cultural role of the English squirarchy. A crucial step in the process of social differentiation was the construction of appropriately large country seats.[147]

In England the great country house was the preserve of the landed, politically prominent elite, proclaiming the status and distinction of the English squires and their families who lived in them. The family seat "became, on the one hand, the embodiment of ancestral patrimony and the outward symbol of the dignity and authority of their owner, and on the other, a machine for living the life of an English country gentleman."[148] The houses of the English landed gentry, those men who in the eighteenth century came to be known as the 'squirarchy,' served a number of important functions: they were administrative centers for vast landed estates,

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[145] Greene and Pole, Colonial British America, 14-15.

[146] For English county communities see Mark A. Kishlansky, "Community and Continuity: Review of Selected Work on English Social History" WMQ, 3rd ser., 37 (1980): 139-46.

[147] Isaac, Transformation, 39.

[148] Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, An Open Elite? England 1540-1880 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 199.

and had perforce to accommodate administrative needs; they were furthermore the centers of working farms, and had to function as farmhouses, complete with stables, barns, and other dependencies. Above all else, however, they were centers of political prestige. They presented an imposing appearance to the outside world, from positions that maximized their visibility, in order to impress upon the surrounding countryside the authority of the owner. Not for nothing the machismo of Sir John Vanbrugh, who promised his clients "a noble and masculine" display, "a noble thing" replete with "manly beauty."[149] These houses were constructed as forums for the exercise of patronage, hospitality, and the practice of polite society.

Few gentlemen's houses in Virginia matched the scale of their English counterparts. The brick governor's "palace" in Williamsburg, constructed between 1706 and 1714, was itself the house of a modest gentleman by English standards.[150] But in the colony it provided a model of genteel living that was emulated by the Virginia gentry. Between 1714 and 1776, some forty country houses--styled directly from English models and often designed using English pattern books--were constructed in Virginia. As early as 1722, Robert Beverly remarked that Virginia houses "of late . . . have made their stories much higher than formerly, and their windows larger, and sashed with crystal glass, adorning their apartments with rich furniture."[151] Even in the last third of the eighteenth century, when Jefferson's Monticello achieved true aristocratic refinement in the Piedmont, no Virginia dwelling could match the elegance and scale of the houses occupied by the majority of England's politically active country squires.

Like their English counterparts, if on a less monumental scale, Virginia country houses were definite statements of social rank and political power. The classical formalism of their design, as well as scale and location, echoed this role, despite the less-refined ornamental treatment and the use of subordinate materials. In the typical plan, the central "head" of the house was flanked by lower, symmetrical dependencies. "A strong sense of gradations of dominance and submission," writes one historian, "was expressed in the elevation of a central unit by means of balanced, subordinated lateral units."[152] While the administrative functions of the colonial planter's house were different from those of the English squire (the planter directed the labor of numerous slaves on several plantations; the squire administered the rents and leases of numerous tenants on several estates), both were forums for the practice and display of genteel living, with all of its attendant significance for separating patrician rulers from plebeian commoners. These houses, constructed as the Virginia gentry became distinguishable from the rest of the population as a class, were visible symbols of the consolidation of gentry power. In their turn, they themselves became models of elevated living for aspiring planters in the back-country.

In the Piedmont and Southside, houses tended to be smaller, and less oriented toward social

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149 ibid., 206.

150 Richard L. Bushman, "American High-style and Vernacular Cultures," in Greene and Pole, Colonial British America, 349.

151 ibid.

152 Isaac, Transformation, 38.

display. Many of the buildings were constructed in a regional, folk tradition, that while functional, emphasized speed and convenience of construction rather than permanence or architectural style.[153] Indeed, the first framed house in Lunenburg County (which in the early eighteenth century, included most of the Southside) was built in the 1730s by Clement Read, one of its wealthiest residents. In 1815 the county (considerably reduced in size as increased population dictated the subdivision of new counties from Lunenburg's immense territory) contained about 978 houses, though only twenty-five were valued at more than $500, and barely nine were worth more than $1,000. That year there was a single brick house that might be considered worthy of a country gentleman. In Halifax County (southwest of Lunenburg County) in 1785, the largest house measured 42 x 28 feet, and nearly 80 percent of the county's houses contained less than 400 square feet.[154]

Henry twice lived in houses compatible with genteel living. Scotchtown, in Hanover county, was his home from 1771 until 1776. The massive frame structure was by no means comparable to the brick country houses of Tidewater gentry in form or elegance, but it was certainly of sufficient size and grandeur to accommodate the needs of an active politician of Henry's rising stature.[155] The house stood at the center of a fine estate that been the home of John Robinson, a former speaker of the Virginia House of Burgesses and colonial treasurer. Robinson had been generally esteemed as one of Virginia's leading gentlemen. Dabney Carr remembered Henry's fashionable appearance before the American Revolution, when he lived at Scotchtown. "When I first saw Mr. Henry, which was in March 1773, he wore a peach blossom-colored coat and a dark wig, which tied behind, and I believe, a bag to it."[156] Scotchtown became a center of hospitality for visitors drawn to the estate by Henry's local prominence, his political eminence or his increasing legal practice, and the vast attic chamber was the scene of dancing and conviviality.[157]

The Williamsburg "palace," which set the tone for many of the gentry houses, was Henry's home from 1776 until 1779, while he served as governor. In these years Henry seems to have lived something approximating the life of a gentleman. His young wife, Dorothea, administered the expenditure of the considerable sum of £1,000 to decorate the mansion, which had been stripped of its furnishings by the British.[158] Spencer Roane, years later, recollected to William Wirt, "when [Henry] was governor the second time (and I presume more so the first), he rarely appeared in the streets, and never without a scarlet cloak, black clothes, and a dressed wig, &c. . . . I expect he considered this course a just adaptation to the public

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[153] Cary Carson, et al., "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," in Robert Blair St. George, ed., Material Life in America, 1600-1860, 113-58.

[154] Beeman, Evolution of the Southern Backcountry, 38-39, 180-82.

[155] See the description of Scotchtown in A Report on Red Hill, Last Home and Burial Place of Patrick Henry, prepared for the U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Southeast Region (August 1962), 35-42.

[156] Cited in Wirt, Sketches, 108.

[157] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 124-28.

[158] Mayer, Son of Thunder, 325.

opinion." Roane added that Henry's family "lived as genteelly, and associated with as polished society, as any governor before or since has ever done. He entertained as much company as others, and in as genteel a style."[159] At the same time, Henry invested in a carriage of suitable dignity for a man of his stature, one valued at more than £100.[160] By 1779 Henry would seem to have established himself by lifestyle, economic stature, and political position as a member of the first rank of Virginia's gentry.

But Henry's experiment with high-style living did not last. All the dwellings in which he lived after 1779 were more akin to the modest Mount Brilliant home of his boyhood than to the mansions of Scotchtown and the governor's palace (see table 1). Leatherwood, where he lived from 1779-83, was located some 180 miles from Richmond on a 10,000-acre tract in Henry County, distant from refined society. Salisbury, his home from 1784-86, was a fine wood-framed, one-and-one-half story house that, while moderately large, could not support the same elevated lifestyle as Scotchtown. Pleasant Grove, in Prince Edward County, was located on a plantation of some 1,700 acres; little is known of its appearance. Long Island, a five-room, two-story frame building sited on a ridge overlooking the Staunton River was, like Leatherwood, remote from society. And Red Hill, Henry's last home, was a moderate-sized plantation house overlooking the juncture of the Falling and Staunton rivers.[161] These houses, along with their dependencies, were suitable for operating plantations and administering Henry's legal practice; Salisbury and Prince Edward were sufficiently large to entertain political visitors, but none were statements of social superiority.

In the early 1790s, Henry moved back and forth considerably between the houses at Long Island and Red Hill. Tax records suggest that he lived at Long Island in 1794, and at Red Hill in 1793 and 1795-99,[162] but they may merely show where Henry happened to be living at the time of the tax assessment. Of the two, Henry preferred Long Island because he believed it a healthier location. In October 1793 he wrote there, "We shall go to Red Hill, eighteen miles below this in a few days to spend eight months, but spend the sickly season here." He likely stayed at Red Hill in the fall and winter 1793, and returned to Long Island in the spring. In summer 1794, Henry was again at Long Island, writing to his daughter Elizabeth, "We go to Red Hill in August for five weeks." He also expressed the desire to see her, indicating that his

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[159] Excerpts from Judge Spencer Roane's Memorandum, cited in George Morgan, The True Patrick Henry, 438, and cited in Tyler, Henry, 300.

[160] Beeman, Henry, 110.

[161] "A Report on Red Hill," 52-57; Meade, Henry, 426-27, 244-45. Little is known about the Prince Edward or Leatherwood houses. Accounts exist of visits to both, but there is no discussion of either house; see Philip Mazzei's account of Leatherwood in Charles P. Blunt IV, Patrick Henry: The Henry County Years, 24-25; and Richard Venable's account of a visit to Prince Edward, in the Richard Venable Diary, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

[162] Personal Tax records for Charlotte and Campbell counties, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond; residence site is deduced from the location of Henry's carriage.

Table 1. **THE RESIDENCESOF PATRICKHENRY(1736-99)**

DWELLING	LOCATION	TENURE	ACREAGE
STUDLEY	Hanover Co.	1736-49	unknown
MT. BRILLIANT/ THE RETREAT	Hanover Co.	1749-54	unknown
PINE SLASH at RURAL PLAINS PLANT'N	Hanover Co.	1754-57	300
HANOVER TAVERN	Hanover Co.	1757-65	300
ROUNDABOUT	Louisa Co.	1765-71	1,700
SCOTCHTOWN	Hanover Co.	1771-76 (sold 1778)	960
GOVERNOR'S PALACE	Williamsburg	1776-79	n/a
LEATHERWOOD	Henry Co.	1779-84	10,000
GOVERNOR'S HOUSE	Richmond	1784-86	n/a
SALISBURY	Chesterfield Co.	1784-86	16,000
PLEASANT GROVE	Prince Edward Co.	1786-92	1,700
LONG ISLAND	Campbell Co.	1792-ca.1794	3,522
RED HILL	Charlotte Co.	1793, 1795-99	492 (Fusqua tract, pur. 1792) 700 (Booker tract, pur. 1794) 2,920 (Total acreage owned at Red Hill in 1799)
also:			
SEVEN ISLANDS	Halifax Co.	working, 1797-	1,400
SAURA TOWN	North Carolina	working, 1797-	6,314

This chart excludes lands Henry purchased as speculations, in western Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, North Carolina and Georgia.

older daughters were growing restive at the distant Long Island. "I wish you were with us to enjoy the agreeable society of your sisters at this place, which is very retired; indeed, so much so as to disgust Dolly & Sally."[163] Red Hill, situated on a crossing of the Staunton River, may indeed have been a more socially active environment, although it, too, was distinguished by seclusion.

Little is known about Red Hill's appearance. It is not described on land plats or in fire- insurance records, nor do any traveler's accounts mention it; and there are no local maps for the years before the Civil War. The earliest depiction of the house dates from 1845, when Henry Howe published a short description and sketch of it in his Historical Collections of Virginia. Howe mentions gardens in his account, but these are likely the formal parterres of boxwood that Elvira, wife of Patrick Henry's son John, planted in the 1830s. The earliest mention of dependency buildings date from 1872. That year Patrick Fontaine, Henry's great-grandson, recalled that "[Henry] had in his yard at Red Hill . . . an office built at some distance from his dwelling. An avenue of fine black locusts shaded a walk in front of it." Roane recollected, "When at [Henry's] dwelling at Prince Edward, I lodged with my family in his study (house room being scarce)"; it is likely that Henry had a similar structure at Red Hill. Other than archaeological evidence, there is no surviving indication of landscaping at the site.[164]

The Red Hill complex that exists today is a 1950s interpretation of a small but typical well-to-do eighteenth-century plantation. It includes the main dwelling and six detached service buildings: an office, kitchen, privy, smokehouse, stables and carriage house, and slave cabin. Most of these have been reconstructed, although the office and cabin are purported to be in part original to Henry's tenure. The estate was inherited through the Henry line, and in 1907 Lucy Harrison, Henry's great-granddaughter, employed Philadelphia architect Charles Barton Keen to design additions to and supervise the construction of a new wing to the John Henry house, incorporating the original Patrick Henry house. Keen, in turn, employed as his assistant a young local architect named Stanhope S. Johnson. He surveyed the property and made detailed sketches of the existing house, including a portion that was the original Patrick Henry dwelling. Harrison's house, including the wing containing the original Patrick Henry house, burned in 1919. Johnson's sketches, made between 1907 and 1912, provided the basis for Johnson's reconstruction of the plantation in 1956-57. National Park Service researchers apparently had access to the sketches in 1962, but they have since been lost. By all indications, Johnson was meticulous and it is likely that the reconstructed house is an accurate reproduction of the original that he measured ca. 1907.[165]

The limited surviving evidence suggests that in form and scale, if not the finer details, the existing reconstructed plantation is accurate. It is Red Hill's modest character that surprises the observer. Evaluating Red Hill in the shadow of the grander Georgian mansions of Henry's political peers, and

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[163] Henry to Elizabeth Aylett, 26 October 1793, in Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 422-23; Henry to Elizabeth Aylett, 8 September 1794, in Henry, Henry, vol. 3, 423-24.

[164] Howe, Historical Collections of Virginia . . . (Charleston, SC, 1845), 220-23; "Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey, Red Hill, Charlotte County, Virginia," Browning and Associates (May 1989), 14; Patrick Fontaine Mss., 1872, Red Hill (I am indebted to Mark Couvillon for this reference); Spencer Roane Memorandum, transcript, in Morgan, History, 440.

[165] Johnson's copious letters, documenting the care he took in the reconstruction, are in the Stanhope Johnson Papers, Red Hill Reconstruction Files, Jones Memorial Library, Lynchburg, Virginia; see also "A Report on Red Hill, Last Home and Burial Place of Patrick Henry," National Park Service, Southeast Region (1962); and the "General Development Plan, Red Hill, Patrick Henry National Memorial," National Park Service, Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (1987).

considering his substantial financial resources, one might expect Henry to have lived in a grander setting. But the scale of Red Hill is deceptive. Henry did not abandon gentry living. His house at Red Hill contained the accoutrements of refined, high-style gentry life: fine wood furniture, a backgammon table, bed curtains, a silver tea service, a "fortepeano," and an extensive library that included volumes on the law, religion, classics, and history, as well as works of fiction.[166] Henry was one of a very few gentlemen in Charlotte, Prince Edward or Campbell counties to own a carriage. Roane recollected that "his dress was plain, as was his house and furniture"; while Roane was correct about the house, Henry's furniture was, if plain, certainly expensive.[167] Red Hill reflected the changed circumstances of Virginia's republican gentry. Henry understood and lived the life of a gentleman, but he did not project it loudly, as gentlemen would have before the American Revolution. In his lifestyle at Red Hill, Henry struggled instead to project republican values, at the same time absorbing the modified gentry culture of the 1790s. In the aftermath of the Revolution, in the Southside, and in a moral climate in which, Henry feared, public virtue was fast slipping away, Henry shied away from ostentatious display and luxury, and turned inward to a refined domestic life. His was the life of a republican gentleman; he did not reject gentility, so much as mute it.

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[166] See the inventory of Henry's estate, Appendix D, in Morgan, True Patrick Henry, 461-73. Compare these furnishings with those discussed by Lorena Walsh and Lois Carr, "Changing Lifestyles in Colonial St. Mary's County," Regional Economic History Research Center, Working Papers 1, no. 3 (1978), 72-118; "Inventories and Analysis of Wealth and Consumption Patterns in St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1658-1777," Historical Methods 13 (1980), 81-104.

[167] Personal Property Tax Lists, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, 1788-99, to determine ownership of carriages; see Spencer Roane Memorandum, transcript, in Morgan, Henry, 438.

CONCLUSION

Patrick Henry's life spanned an era of immense change in American social and political institutions. He grew up in a time when gentlemen ruled Virginia, in a household that obtained, then lost, gentry status. Much of his early life was devoted to regaining the social and political prominence that his father once possessed. Henry developed a legal practice in the 1760s, which provided the capital for him to engage in land speculation and the purchase of lucrative tobacco plantations. As he prospered--financially and politically--he came to identify closely with the Virginia gentry whose ranks, in fact, he entered by the mid-1760s.

Henry joined a gentry that increasingly perceived itself under threat. This sense of crisis intensified through the end of the 1760s and into the early 1770s. Henry absorbed a particular set of political beliefs and assumptions, supported by a body of serious political philosophy that derived from the context of early eighteenth-century English politics. Adherents to these notions viewed the world with a concern for English rights and liberties, which in their perception were best protected under the English constitution. Commonwealth politicians and philosophers believed that the English constitution best balanced the legitimate interests of King, aristocrats, and people, but argued that too much authority and power was becoming invested in the monarch, undermining traditional English liberties. Transferred to the American colonies, these ideas provided the framework by which colonial leaders justified the split with Great Britain, and in which they constructed the constitutional arrangements of the new government. Henry consistently associated republicanism with the Virginia gentry, whose notions of public stewardship were remarkably compatible with commonwealth ideology.

As the revolutionary crisis intensified in the 1770s, Henry came to feel that the rule of gentlemen in Virginia and the institutions that preserved it were threatened by metropolitan encroachments. Along with other "radical" gentry politicians, he took steps to solidify gentry consensus for independence, and then to mobilize Virginia's yeomen in support of revolution. Henry accomplished this masterfully, for he was one of Virginia's finest orators, and his rhetoric provided a bridge between gentlemen and yeomen. In part, the source of his rhetorical power was a combination of gentry purview and evangelical speaking style. Henry quickly emerged as one of Virginia's most successful political leaders.

Henry's loyalty to Virginia and the political institutions of the gentleman planters who ruled there did not waver throughout the Revolutionary War or the debate afterward over the appropriate structure that political institutions should take. He did, however, become concerned about the virtue of Virginia's citizens. Hardship and opportunism generated by the war combined to undermine popular support for the Revolution, which Henry attributed in part to the weakness of the Anglican church. At the same time as Henry perceived a declining public virtue, he grew concerned about the threat that a national government might pose to Virginia's gentry establishment. In the 1788 ratifying convention Henry threw his weight against the proposed constitution, convinced that it would strip Virginia of her sovereignty. After losing the ratification battle, Henry retired to devote time to his private affairs.

It was only in the late 1790s that Henry once again became politically active. The French Revolution provided ample confirmation of Federalist fears that unrestrained democracy would degenerate into

violence and anarchy. When Democratic-Republicans--using many of the same methods that Henry had used in the 1770s and 1780s--organized a popular political party advocating allegiance with France, Henry again entered the political fray. Although he died in 1799, it is likely that he would have failed a second time, for the momentum against the regime of deferential politics was strong and growing stronger. This transformation of politics would culminate in the 1830s, with Jacksonian democracy.

Henry's political attachments were reflected in his personal life. In the 1770s, as a full-fledged member of the highest Virginia society, Henry embraced a lifestyle designed to proclaim his social and economic status. But as the revolutionary and post-revolutionary political society evolved, gentry claims to political leadership came less from the distinctiveness of their culture and attainment and more from their claim to moral superiority. The republican political idiom taught citizens how to recognize the virtuous man. Ostentation and conspicuous display carried connotations of metropolitan luxury and vice; simplicity, frugality, and moderation became the dominant political values. Gentry society internalized these values, but did not abandon cultivation. Henry lived the remainder of his life surrounded by goods that proclaimed his membership in polished society, with a concern for the example he set for others. But it was a far more private proclamation, and the example he set was one of forbearance and restraint.

The reminiscences collected by William Wirt in the years after Henry's death emphasize Henry's virtue. "He had no vice that I knew of, and scarcely a foible," wrote Spencer Roane. Edmund Winston remarked that "he was uniformly an affectionate husband and parent, and a kind master to his servants . . . . He was throughout his life negligent of his dress, yet he had the manners of a gentleman. In conversation he was cheerful, and not improperly reserved." George Dabney recalled, "he was remarkably Temperate both in eating and drinking from his Youth thro' life."[168] Historians have tended to view these statements, and many others like them, as romanticized visions of Henry's life. Their healthy skepticism provides a much- needed corrective to the mythology perpetrated by William Wirt, especially for the treatment of Henry's earlier years. But these statements were made by men who knew Henry during the last years of his life, and the very consistency with which images of virtuous living appear in their reminiscences suggests that Henry was successful indeed at projecting the image of republican restraint. By every account he appeared a model citizen and a republican gentleman--precisely as he would have wished it.

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[168] Spencer Roane Memorandum, transcript, in Morgan, Henry, 454; Edmund Winston Memorandum, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress; Memorandum, George Dabney to William Wirt, 14 May 1805, Patrick Henry and Family Collection, Library of Congress.

Appendix A:

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals the person of Patrick Henry. But the dilemma remains of how much of Red Hill is consistent with Henry's last years, in view of the subsequent alterations, the fire, and mid twentieth-century reconstruction. The assessment of the property is based on first-hand observation of the buildings and setting as artifact, as well as period documents, occasional graphic images, and the preceding reports produced by and for the National Park Service and the Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation. Since historical documentary research has uncovered little that illuminates particular activity at Red Hill, the only avenue of research left to pursue is subsurface.

Since historically the outbuildings have been moved several times and there are known elements of the typical plantationscape missing, a comprehensive archaeological investigation is recommended before commencing any further alteration of the site.[169] This should encompass a non-exclusive survey of the entire area within the unused circumferential road with subsurface exploration specifically oriented to locate: building foundations, walks/paths, well(s), trash pit(s), tree roots, and garden seeds. In particular, the existence of the following sites and structures needs to be confirmed and their location identified: kitchen and/or formal garden, the kitchen, ice house, mill, distillery and/or laundry, orangery, blacksmithy, lookout tower, and slave cabins.

GENERAL SITE

Since the sketches made by Stanhope Johnson about 1907 appear to have been lost, the earliest delineated plan of the site is by his employer, Charles Barton Keene, which shows the estate fully developed with the enlarged mansion and nineteenth-century plantings (VA-1034, page 15). The site's most apparent feature is the overgrown boxwood on the south and north lawns. The reconstruction and period of significance, however, is based on Henry's occupancy at the end of the eighteenth century, prior to the introduction of these parterres. Currently immense and no longer aligned the dwelling's entrance, this feature should be removed completely to recapture the appropriate scale and forms of the setting. In turn, any discovered eighteenth-century planting scheme, which was probably located east of the house, should be reinstituted.

The appropriateness of the fieldstone path should be addressed as more information is gleaned about the original layout of the grounds. Typically, such paths would have been topped with small pebbles and/or shell matter, rather than expensive materials such as brick and stone.

The road that surrounds the estate probably existed, at least crudely, in the eighteenth century, although no graphic evidence has been found to substantiate this. Nevertheless, the paved road that is in place, slowly being eroded by the lawn, does not represent a significant conflict with the site. The linear arrangement of the outbuildings east of the dwelling is not uncommon within the context

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[169] The report "Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey, Red Hill, Charlotte County, Va.," prepared recently by Browning & Associates (draft, no date), inadequately fulfills subsurface investigation. The author's probe survey, for instance, "was unsystematic in that the entire area was not surveyed. . . selected areas were probed for sub-turf remains," p. 11.

of eighteenth-century plantation planning, which emulated a small, well-organized town. The kitchen was historically one of the closest structures to the dwelling, at an average of 20 feet. However, for practical or sanitation purposes, it is doubtful that it, the privy, smokehouse, and slave cabin would be so compacted among themselves or in proximity to the dwelling.

FORM AND MATERIALS

The overall materials employed in the reconstruction reflect relatively lavish expense and design. The consistent use of beaded, tongue-in-groove weatherboard seems be too refined a type of wood siding for this scale and location. Also, the extensive use of brick and stone for foundations and flooring and walkways is more in keeping with a Colonial Revival interpretation of the period; tooled joints, a formal aesthetic used on all brick work, is equally out of keeping with the construction of service buildings such as a privy or smokehouse. The individual buildings reflect various other inconsistencies with the architecture of the period.

Dwelling

Some details of reconstruction are clearly a product of the twentieth century or lack explanation whatsoever. The east porch, for example, features machine-turned posts and a lattice-clad foundation; the angled "shelf" near the porch door is poorly explained as a resting point between kitchen and dwelling (its angle seems perilous and there is no evidence the kitchen occupied this site, historically). Several rooms also feature built-in closets, which are late eighteenth-century inventions (taxed as rooms) in only the highest-style homes of the period, and are rare in such hall-and-parlor plans.

Inside the dwelling, inappropriate window drapes and floral wallpaper are most obviously out of character. The mantels are also somewhat inconsistent in terms of design; the second-floor bedroom features a classical pattern of inverted "i"s, while the mantel in the downstairs shed addition bears a modest flower motif--neither of which, for placement or design, is wholly accurate.

An inventory made after Henry's death provides the model from which to furnish the rooms.

Law Office

The most noteworthy dependency, the law office, is difficult to ascertain because of some interior features. Relocated twice, it was extensively altered when combined with William Wirt's law office in the nineteenth century (VA-1034-A, page 5). In 1956 this structure was allegedly restored rather than reconstructed.

The Law Office's east room features built-in three-quarter-height bookshelves that line the south, east, and north walls. Yet, during Henry's tenure, books would more likely be stored in freestanding furniture that had the advantage of mobility.

There is some discrepancy between the two back-to-back hearths: the west one appears to be the oldest and most historic, while the east firebox rests on a raised brick 'pad' and reflects the presence of a vented stove rather than an open hearth. The west room's exposed roof beams (encased in paneling) also differ from the flush board ceiling in the east room. Investigation of the attic interior

may offer some clues to this arrangement.

Kitchen

The kitchen's basic form and features are in keeping with eighteenth-century typology, however the one at Red Hill is altogether too elaborate and contrived for such a utilitarian structure. Foremost is the interior, which is finished in horizontal paneling in a dark brown color; this is a contrast to the typical kitchen of the period, which would be largely plastered with minimum paneling to maintain a well-lit, clean, and sanitary environment. A fireproof brick or stone floor such as this would help prevent the accidental sparking of a fire, should a coal roll out of the hearth, but it is relatively unusual to find the entire floor so finished. Most often the floor was dirt or wood, and an extended hearth area was finished in brick or stone.

In addition to the oversized hearth, there is an adjacent bake oven and warming shelves. Historical documentation of contemporary kitchens suggests that the original kitchen would feature a wood shelf or mantel above the hearth rather that the stepped brick ledge that is in place. The bake oven would likely be less rectilinear, and feature a removable iron or wood door instead of the formally and finely crafted fittings in the existing door frame and door. Similarly, the built-in corner cabinets reflect an organization aesthetic uncharacteristic for this time and place.

In general, the kitchen, smokehouse, and well would be likely be sited together. Historical evidence from contemporary sites suggests that these buildings, each devoted to food-preparation requirements, would be near the kitchen garden and stables, if these existed at Red Hill. Thus, water would be convenient for cooking, cleaning, and washing, as well as dousing out-of-control fires. Evidence for this may be uncovered through archaeological investigation.

Privy

This privy is allegedly modeled on an example found nearby at the time of reconstruction. An effort should be made to substantiate this claim and identify the source, if possible. An archaeological survey would likely help determine the form and location of the original, which was probably not located so close to the house or kitchen, for sanitary reasons. The materials used here--stone flooring and brick foundation--seem exceptionally out of place for a building that was often relocated over the years.

Smokehouse

This is reconstructed as a typical eighteenth-century smokehouse would have appeared, although, for the same reasons as the kitchen, it would likely have been farther away from the dwelling.

Slave Cabin

This cabin and the stables-carriagehouse are the two structures believed to have been restored rather than reconstructed, both in 1965. In general, the interior is far too finished and refined to represent a typical slave dwelling. Slave quarters were typically equipped only with the bare essentials for cooking and sleeping, with a small cooking hearth and upstairs loft to accommodate more persons. The use of stone for the chimney is also somewhat lavish, compared to brick and/or wood chimneys found on some slave cabins. The amenities here--bedsteads, pots and pans--would have been minimal.

According to records, at the time of his death Henry owned 66 slaves at Red Hill, which encompassed nearly 3,000 acres. How many worked at the house and immediate garden as compared with the fields is unknown. However additional slave lodgings surely existed in the vicinity.

Dendrochronology may be used to date the log members and determine what of the fabric is historic.

Stables and Carriagehouse

This combined structure, designed by Stanhope Johnson and built in 1965, is largely a fabrication that incorporates part of an existing log structure. According to unsubstantiated oral history, these remnants may have been part of a cabin occupied by two household slaves. It might also be the wall remains of an ice house that was existed northwest of the dwelling from at least the mid-nineteenth century until 1907 for several reasons: log would be a better insulating material than frame, the ice house was one of the few dependencies west of the dwelling, and it is no longer extant.

Dendrochronology may be used to date the log members and determine what of the fabric is historic.

Other Dependencies

There are a number of other service buildings not found at Red Hill that were typically found at self-sufficient plantations of this period. Among the possibilities are a mill, distillery, and laundry located east of the existing buildings near the river tributary. There was also an ice house, an alleged nailery, and of necessity there must have been additional barn and slave buildings. Persistent local legend, which seems to have originated in colorful stories reported in the Morgan biography, describes a "look-out tower" on the site, although the existence of this structure remains unsubstantiated.

Gardens

Most eighteenth-century plantations required two types of gardens: formal and decorative, kitchen and utilitarian. Given the topography of the site, they were probably adjacent to one another east of the buildings in the terraced or sunken areas identified by the archaeologist and landscaped by ensuing residents. If Henry had a formal garden, in the context of these buildings it was probably relatively simple. The kitchen garden, however, would have been imperative as the source of fruits, vegetable, and herbs for seasoning and medicinal purposes.

Logically, this was often found near the kitchen, for convenience, and near the stable, to minimize the distance between it and the source of fertilizer.

The landscape history at Red Hill is one of the least chronicled aspects of the property; all that exists today are the boxwood formations, which definitely came after Patrick Henry's tenure.

Ideally, if archaeological investigation identifies Red Hill's buildings and their known location, they should be re-sited accordingly. Additional buildings may be indicated by identifying and interpreting the location of their foundations, or perhaps additional reconstruction.

Appendix B:

Red Hill Site Evaluation and Structural Assessment
December, 1989, Willie Graham, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

POST OFFICE BOX C
WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA 23187

December 1, 1989

Jim Elson
Executive Director
Red Hill
The Patrick Henry National Memorial
Brookneal, Virginia 24528

Dear Jim:

I hope this arrives in time for your meeting Monday. I apologize for taking so long to respond to your letter, but I felt that I needed to devote some time to answering your questions. I did enjoy my visit with you and Irving Walker, and was pleased to see Al Chambers again. He is a valuable resource and, if he is willing, I would certainly get his thoughts on what to do with the site as well.

Before dealing with your specific questions, I would first like to recount here the observations we made on the site the day of my visit. When Stanhope Johnson reconstructed Red Hill in the 1950s, he used nineteenth-century detailing that post-dated the period in which Patrick Henry occupied the site. The nineteenth-century work is so extensive that it includes most of the exterior woodwork--cornice, shutters, window trim, doors, siding, etc.--and all visible interior trim.

Al Chambers and I both suspected that the present chamber addition dates to the 1830s. In his report entitled "Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey, Red Hill, Charlotte County, VA" (Brookneal, VA: Patrick Henry National Memorial, pp. 14, 38), Lyle Browning indicates his support for this theory. With the information provided me at the time of my visit, it appears that the house that John Henry inherited consisted of the hall, stair passage, and the shed to the east. I think it is even possible that the house John assumed was built by his father, and not by Booker. Sometime in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, John enlarged the house and modified the original portion.

It is my suggestion that the new house he created is consistent with building schemes from the period, not only in the details of the moldings, but in the spatial layout and social uses of those spaces. The new portion of the structure was laid out as

a two-story, side-passage, double-parlor house. The original hall seems to have been converted to a dining room, complete with new trim, and it was connected to the new block by means of a new hyphen. I further suppose that the hyphen had no chimney, and that the reconstructed kitchen dates to this period as well.

The resulting plan is like many known in the Chesapeake from this period. There is a move in the nineteenth century towards twin entertaining spaces, and often the dining room is detached from the house and connected either with a porch (as at the Grammer House on High Street in Petersburg) or by a hyphen or passage (as at Powers-Holloway House in Port Royal). The shift begins in the late eighteenth century, but I suspect that the clear move of the dining room away from other enternaining spaces is distinctly nineteenth century (such as at Staunton Hill).

Without knowing the history of the site, I would also be willing to guess that many of the outbuildings are nineteenth century as well. Browning suggests another kitchen site, and the outbuildings on the river side of the house seem to better respond to John's period of construction than Patrick's. In addition, I suspect the law office is later than supposed. The central chimney arrangement does not lend itself well to such a structure (the office at Tuckahoe, for instance, is a one-room, unheated building), and what few original details that are visible appear late. Fortunately, though, some original fabric and framing survive. A close analysis of the structure and the use of dendrochronology has the potential to give fairly precise dating for the building and may suggest original usage.

I would suggest that Stanhope Johnson, when recreating the house and environment, based his work fairly strictly on the house as it existed when measured earlier in the century. Since the drawings obviously reflected its late Federal/early Greek Revival state, that is what was recorded and then reconstructed. I am not assuming the reconstruction was done in ignorance; it is entirely possible that Johnson understood that at least the molding profiles were from the 1830s. However, the consequence of his decision has broad implications for you.

The site that you now control is essentially a second quarter of the nineteenth-century environment. The house plan is somewhat odd, retaining the dining room wing and hyphen of the period II house without the accompanying two-story, main block. Aside from this, the gardens, walkways, cemetery, outbuildings, "law office," and the interior and exterior of the house all reflect the antebellum period.

To complicate the picture somewhat, some of Johnson's work is not appropriate for either Patrick's or John's period. For instance, the exterior color scheme represents 1950s thought on paint and is based more on Victorian ideas and decorator taste

than actual traditional practices. Likewise, the interior wallpaper is quite inappropriate, and much of the hardware is not hand forged.

In order to make Red Hill a credible museum site, some sense needs to be made of it. This is obviously not the best of Stanhope Johnson's work, nor is it a particularly good Colonial Revival site, and therefore I do not feel that the 1950s work is inherently sacred. To return the house and farm complex to Patrick Henry's period would require completely gutting inside and outside of the house, demolition of the chamber end of the house, the removal of the nineteenth-century gardens and some of the outbuildings, and the reconstruction of others. A lot of research would have to be done in order to succeed well with this scenario, starting with an extensive archaeological excavation and a search and analysis of eighteenth and nineteenth-century documentary sources related to the plantation. The cost of such a move would be prohibitive, and I think not necessary.

A second less radical approach would be to accept the nineteenth-century site as given and try to make the details more accurate. Red Hill is not a good site to discuss material culture or architectural history, and thus the fabric could be relegated to play a minor role in the interpretation. With a phased plan, you could quickly make alterations to those things that are strikingly wrong but inexpensive to fix, and then more carefully study the site to fix the more subtle or costly errors.

With this last strategy, I would suggest that a rational approach could be brought to the project by accepting John Henry's environment, using it as a backdrop to the Patrick Henry interpretation, but explaining clearly to the public upfront the discrepancy. Before making any physical changes to the place, I would have good quality black-and-white photographs (preferably in 4 x 5 or larger format) taken of the entire site to document how it looks before any alterations occur. I would next paint all of the outbuildings--trim and all--either white or with whitewash. Eventually the house will need repainting in another color, but that could wait. The wallpaper should be stripped, and the walls painted with whitewash. The floorboards should be carefully stripped to the bare wood and maintained this way. The wall of the cemetery should be properly reconstructed, after first having a small strip of archaeology tested to determine the original configuration. Without any further evidence, I would rebuild the wall similar to that done at Prestwould in Mecklenburg County.

Beyond this, additional research should be done in order to refine the scheme for creating a more authentic environment. Archaeology around the house should reveal something about construction sequence and room usage. The dig may turn up hardware and other architectural fragments to fill in the gaps in our knowledge. Again, I would reiterate that documentary research

should be pursued, especially for the nineteenth century. I would especially look for an inventory from John's period.

The next phase of work might include changes to the heating system to make it more efficient and less visible, a new interior and exterior paint scheme for the house, and the replacement of some of the hardware with hand-forged work. Work could proceed on the gardens and the outbuildings improved. Thought should be given to either outline or reconstruct the two-story addition, demolish the chimney to the hyphen, and demolish the carriage house. From the exterior, the latter building appears to be a twentieth-century fantasy and not based on solid period precedent. Research should then be done on the law office, including both a physical analysis and dendrochronology (tree-ring dating). The interior of this latter building could be whitewashed in the interim to make it more believable.

In the final phase, I would recommend having an archaeological study done of the rest of the site to identify and provide details for the gardens, outbuildings, walkways, fences, etc. Appropriate fencing should be reinstalled to redefine original division of spaces in the yard. Likely the domestic yard was segregated from the work space, and the work space from fields and forest.

To return to your questions, your first item concerns the relative dating of different parts of the house. Most of this I have already touched on, but I should note here that most of the light fixtures are inappropriate, as you have suggested. Additionally, the stair appears to be a fabrication of Johnson's and needs further thought.

I have dealt with room usage to the extent that I can without delving further into this project. However, with Al's observations about the door locations and the evidence that was presented with the circa 1900 watercolors, I think more about the original massing can be determined. I think we worked out a plausible scenario, but to be honest, I have forgotten our conclusion.

Concerning the walkways, I would suggest leaving the present stone walks intact until further research is done. The gravel walks that have been contemplated are certainly as inappropriate as the stone ones that were installed in the 50s. There is some evidence that stone may be the correct material for the 1830s period, and thus only the execution may be a problem with the present surfaces.

As to your questions about the law office, I am now tending towards the theory that the siding on the law offices is twentieth century--the portion that looked old may in fact only be heavily weathered. The visible material, such as the interior

joists and some of the surviving door trim, does appear to be nineteenth century. As I have noted earlier, the combination of a physical analysis by a qualified architectural historian and the use of dendrochronology should established the date of construction and possibly the original use. Dr. Herman (Jack) Heikkenen of Blacksburg has done all of the dendro work for the APVA and Colonial Williamsburg and is the only person currently working in this area.

I have already noted that the outbuildings should be whitewashed, including the trim. The shutters and doors should be painted white as well, and consideration should be given to removing the shutters altogether except for those on the main house.

In considering a new heating plant, it would be wise to include some kind of temperature and humidity control to regulate the environment in which your valuable antiques and artifacts are kept.

One final thought. I do think it critical to find Stanhope Johnson's drawings of Red Hill. They would help immensely with our attempts to understand the house and outbuildings. From Browning's report it is clear that at least some of the drawings are at Red Hill. On page 48 of his report, he has copied Johnson's drawing of the blacksmith shop from your files.

I do hope this has been of some help. Please let me know if you need more information, and I will be glad to assist to the best of my ability. I do want to thank you for your kind gift of David Gleason's Virginia Plantation Homes. He is a fabulous photographer and he did give Red Hill fine coverage. As to my travelling expenses, I travelled approximately 150 miles at $.24 per mile. $36 should be plenty adequate for my expenses.

Sincerely,

Willie Graham

Willie Graham
Architectural Historian

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